

BETWEEN RUPTURE AND BARGAINING: POLITICAL STRATEGIES
OF SECESSIONIST GOVERNING PARTIES IN CATALONIA AND SCOTLAND

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Between Rupture and Bargaining: Political Strategies
of Secessionist Governing Parties in Catalonia and Scotland

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ABSTRACT

Between Rupture and Bargaining:

Political Strategies of Secessionist Governing Parties in Catalonia and Scotland

What drives mainstream stateless nationalist parties to adopt secessionist positions? Over the past decade, independence referendums in Catalonia and Scotland have made this question a timely and crucial topic in studies of political parties and nationalism. Although these referendums did not result in the creation of new states, they represented the most concrete attempts toward secession. Using process-tracing and semi-structured in-depth interviews with political elites and activists, this comparative study examines the political strategies of the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia and the Scottish National Party, the mainstream nationalist parties in their respective contexts. It seeks to address the puzzle of how these two parties, positioned on the relatively moderate end of the stateless nationalist party family spectrum, moved beyond the discourse of secessionism to undertake a concrete initiative toward independence through referendums. The study analyzes the divergent paths of radicalization in their territorial strategies and their strategic ambiguities, oscillating between rupture and bargaining. It explains this process through three interrelated variables: the “loosely framed” constitutional contexts at the center, escalating demands for fiscal sovereignty in the periphery, and the internal configuration of secessionism. Challenging traditional structuralist approaches, it highlights the interplay between leadership agency and institutional contexts at critical junctures, framing secessionism as a heterogeneous and dynamic phenomenon.

ÖZET

Pazarlık ve Kopuş Arasında:

Katalonya ve İskoçya’da Ayrılıkçı Hükümet Partilerinin Siyasal Stratejileri

Bölgelerinde başat konumda olan devletsiz milliyetçi partileri ayrılıkçı pozisyonlar benimsemeye iten etmenler nelerdir? Geçtiğimiz on yıl içinde, Katalonya ve İskoçya'daki bağımsızlık referandumları, bu soruyu siyasal partiler ve milliyetçilik çalışmalarında güncel ve önemli bir başlık haline getirdi. Bu referandumlar yeni devletlerin kurulmasıyla sonuçlanmasa da ayrılık yönünde en somut girişimleri temsil etmektedir. Süreç izleme yöntemi ve siyasi elitler ile aktivistlerle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakatları kullanan bu karşılaştırmalı çalışma, kendi bölgelerinde ana akım milliyetçi partiler olan Katalonya'nın Demokratik Kavuşumu ve İskoç Ulusal Partisi'nin siyasi stratejilerini incelemektedir. Çalışma, devletsiz milliyetçi parti ailesi yelpazesinin görece ılımlı ucunda yer alan bu iki partinin ayrılıkçılık söyleminin ötesine geçerek referandumlar yoluyla bağımsızlık yönünde nasıl somut bir girişimde bulundukları sorusuna yanıt aramaktadır. Çalışma, bu partilerin bölgesel stratejilerindeki radikalleşmenin farklı yollarını ve kopuş ile pazarlık arasında gidip gelen stratejik belirsizliklerini analiz etmektedir. Bu süreci birbiriyle ilişkili üç değişkenle açıklamaktadır: merkezdeki “muğlak çerçeve” anayasal bağamlar, çevrede mali egemenlik için artan talepler ve ayrılıkçılığın içsel konfigürasyonu. Geleneksel yapısalcı yaklaşımlardan farklı olarak bu çalışma, dönüm noktalarında liderlik failliği ile kurumsal bağamlar arasındaki etkileşimi vurgulamakta ve ayrılıkçılığı heterojen ve dinamik bir olgu olarak çerçevelemektedir.

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dedicated to the memory of
Muhittin Karkin
friend, comrade, maestro

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMI	Association of Municipalities for Independence (<i>Associació de Municipis per la Independència</i>)
ANC	Catalan National Assembly (<i>Asamblea Nacional Catalana</i>)
BComú	Barcelona in Common (<i>Barcelona en Comú</i>)
BNG	Galician Nationalist Bloc (<i>Bloque Nacionalista Galego</i>)
C's	The Citizens' Party (<i>Ciutadans</i>)
CatDem	Catalanist and Democrat Foundation (<i>Fundació Catalanista i Demòcrata</i>)
CATN	Consultative Council for National Transition (<i>Consell Assessor per a la Transició Nacional</i>)
CC.OO	Workers' Commissions (<i>Comisiones Obreras</i>)
CDC	Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (<i>Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya</i>)
CDRs	Committees for the defense of the referendum/republic (<i>Comités de defensa del referendum/republica</i>)
CEDA	Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Right (<i>Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas</i>)
CEO	Center for Opinion Studies (<i>Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió</i>)
CIS	Center for Sociological Research (<i>Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas</i>)
CiU	Convergence and Union (<i>Convergència i Unió</i>)
CNT	National Confederation of Labor (<i>Confederación Nacional del Trabajo</i>)

Con-Dem	The coalition government between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats
CSQEP	Catalonia Yes We Can (<i>Catalunya Sí Que Es Pot</i>)
CUP	Popular Unity Candidacy (<i>Candidatura d'Unitat Popular</i>)
DC	Democrats of Catalonia (<i>Demòcrates de Catalunya</i>)
EI	Independentist Left (<i>Esquerra Independentista</i>)
ERC	Republican Left of Catalonia (<i>Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya</i>)
FLA	Autonomous Liquidity Fund (<i>Fondo de Liquidez Autonómica</i>)
FPTP	First-past-the-post
HBOS	Halifax Bank of Scotland
IC	Initiative for Catalonia (<i>Iniciativa per Catalunya</i>)
ICV	Initiative for Catalonia Greens (<i>Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds</i>)
JxSí	Together for Yes (<i>Junts Pel Sí</i>)
JNC	Nationalist Youth of Catalonia (<i>Joventut Nacionalista de Catalunya</i>)
Junts	Together for Catalonia (<i>Junts per Catalunya</i>)
LOAPA	Organic Law for the Harmonization of the Autonomy Process (<i>Ley Orgánica de Armonización del Proceso Autonómico</i>)
MES	The Left Movement (<i>Moviment d'Esquerrres</i>)
MSSD	The most similar system design
MDSD	The most different system design
NHS	National Health System
NPS	National Party of Scotland
PAH	People Affected by Mortgages (<i>Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca</i>)
PCE	Communist Party of Spain (<i>Partido Comunista de España</i>)

PDeCAT	Catalan European Democratic Party (<i>Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català</i>)
POUM	Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (<i>Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista</i>)
PSC	Socialists' Party of Catalonia (<i>Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya</i>)
PNV	Basque Nationalist Party (<i>Partido Nacionalista Vasco</i>)
PP	People's Party (<i>Partido Popular</i>)
PPC	Catalan People's Party (<i>Partit Popular Català</i>)
PSAN	Socialist Party of Catalan Countries' National Liberation (<i>Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional</i>)
PSOE	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (<i>Partido Socialista Obrero Español</i>)
PSUC	Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (<i>Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya</i>).
RBS	Royal Bank of Scotland
RIC	Radical Independence Campaign
RUI	Unilateral Independence Referendum (<i>Refendum Unilateral de Independencia</i>)
RUK	Rest of the United Kingdom
SHRA	Scottish Home Rule Association
SNP	Scottish National Party
SNRPs	Stateless nationalist and regionalist parties
SP	Scottish Party
SSP	Scottish Socialist Party
UAB	Autonomous University of Barcelona (<i>Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona</i>)

UCD	Union of Democratic Center (<i>Unión de Centro Democrático</i>)
UDC	Democratic Union of Catalonia (<i>Unió Democràtica de Catalunya</i>)
UGT	Workers' General Union (<i>Unión General de Trabajadores</i>)
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“It is still necessary to make hypotheses, which can guide our investigations along the most fruitful channels, to grasp the real interrelations between apparently unrelated phenomena, to derive order from chaos.”
Woods & Grant (1995)

What drives mainstream stateless nationalist political parties to adopt secessionist positions? Over the past decade, the independence referendums that took place in two Western European democracies have turned this question into a timely and important topic of interest within studies on political parties and nationalism. Although these referendums did not result in the creation of new states, they represented the most concrete and radical attempts in that direction.

In Scotland, an independence referendum was held in September 2014 by the devolved government led by the Scottish National Party (SNP). Despite the victory of the pro-union stance, a significant 44.7% of voters supported independence in an election that saw an exceptionally high turnout of 84.59%. Moreover, in the general and Scottish parliament elections held after the referendum, the SNP succeeded to increase its vote share and continued to govern the devolved administration.

Unlike Scotland, in Catalonia, the Spanish central government refused to grant permission for the autonomous government to hold an official and binding independence referendum. Without the approval from the central government, the pro-independence Catalan government, led by Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (*Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya*, CDC) in coalition with the Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERC), decided to unilaterally organize a referendum in October 2017. More than 2 million people voted in favor of

Catalonia's independence despite attempts by the Spanish government to prevent the referendum through police intervention.¹ Following the unilateral referendum and the subsequent declaration of an independent Catalan Republic, the central government, with the endorsement of the Constitutional Court, announced the dissolution of the Catalan government and parliament. However, in the snap elections held after the dissolution, secessionist parties managed to retain their majority in the Catalan parliament and succeeded in forming a new government.

Considering these two independence referendums, this study examines the political strategies of CDC and the SNP, the mainstream nationalist parties in their respective contexts. Why did these parties adopt a secessionist position? What did this position truly entail, and how did it vary between the two cases? By raising these questions, the study seeks to address the puzzle of how these two parties moved beyond the discourse of secessionism to undertake a concrete and therefore radical initiative toward independence through referendums. In other words, this study aims to explore, compare, and explain the dynamics of radicalization in the political strategies of CDC and SNP.

These questions are important not only for understanding the Catalan and Scottish cases but also for their relevance to other contexts. While the Scottish and Catalan examples represent the most significant and concrete attempts at secession, stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRPs) advocating for greater autonomy or political independence are proliferating and gaining momentum across Europe and other parts of the world (Fagerholm, 2016; della Porta et al., 2020). Defined by their primary aim of achieving, preserving, or expanding "some form of self-government" (De Winter, 1998; Hepburn, 2009), these parties span a wide spectrum, ranging from

¹ According to the statistics of the Catalan Government, the voter turnout was %43, and %90 of those who voted, voted "Yes" for independence. ("El Govern trasllada", 2017)

those seeking regional autonomy to those advocating for full political independence (Massetti & Schakel, 2016). As SNRPs become mass parties in various contexts and/or come to power at the meso or state-wide level², they have begun to develop policies and take stances not only on the center-periphery axis but also on socio-economic issues, ecology, immigration, and European integration (Gomez-Reino, 2008; Alonso et al., 2015). Therefore, SNRPs operate in a multidimensional political space, producing political strategies that extend beyond the territorial dimension to include socio-economic and other issues (Massetti, 2009). Moreover, their territorial strategies may shift over time, evolving from advocating autonomy to pursuing secession, or vice versa (Massetti & Schakel, 2016; Barrio, 2014; Argelaguet, 2014; Elias & Mees, 2015; Gillespie, 2015). Alternatively, they may accommodate diverse tendencies, such as both autonomy advocates and secessionists, within the same party structure (Toubeau & Massetti, 2013; Gillespie, 2016).

1.1 Research questions, objectives and the main argument

This study problematizes the dynamics underlying the construction of political strategies by SNRPs, focusing on the processes through which secessionist governing parties in Catalonia and Scotland pursued independence via referendums during closely related time periods. Based on the Catalan and Scottish cases, it first interrogates the concept of secessionism itself, starting from the question “What drives mainstream stateless nationalist political parties to adopt secessionist positions?” What do SNRPs understand by secession and autonomy, or more broadly, self-governance? Are these understandings homogeneous or heterogeneous, both

² Instead of using the terms “regional” and “national,” I opted for the adjectives “meso” and “statewide” because many stateless nationalist parties reject the label “region” for their entities and instead refer to them as “nations” or “countries.”

within the broader framework of stateless nationalism and more specifically within SNRPs? If they are heterogeneous—and they are—how do these differences manifest themselves in the tensions of unity and conflict within secessionism? Another tricky aspect in this regard is the time variable. Do stateless nationalist actors' understandings of these concepts change over time? If so, what factors drive these changes? Within this framework, the heterogeneity and temporal fluidity of territorial strategy emerge as key aspects that this study identifies as insufficiently explored in the existing literature and aims to investigate.

This research examines both the radicalization dynamics and their divergent paths in these two cases. It argues that these dynamics can only be understood through three common variables and their mutual interactions: (i) "constitutional ambiguity" within the center-periphery cleavage; (ii) "fiscal grievances" within the socio-economic cleavage; (iii) internal configuration of stateless nationalism and the party system in each case. These variables, common to both cases, initially acted as critical antecedents and then took on divergent forms as critical junctures in each case. To put it differently, both cases moved in the same direction but through two different configurations of three main variables.

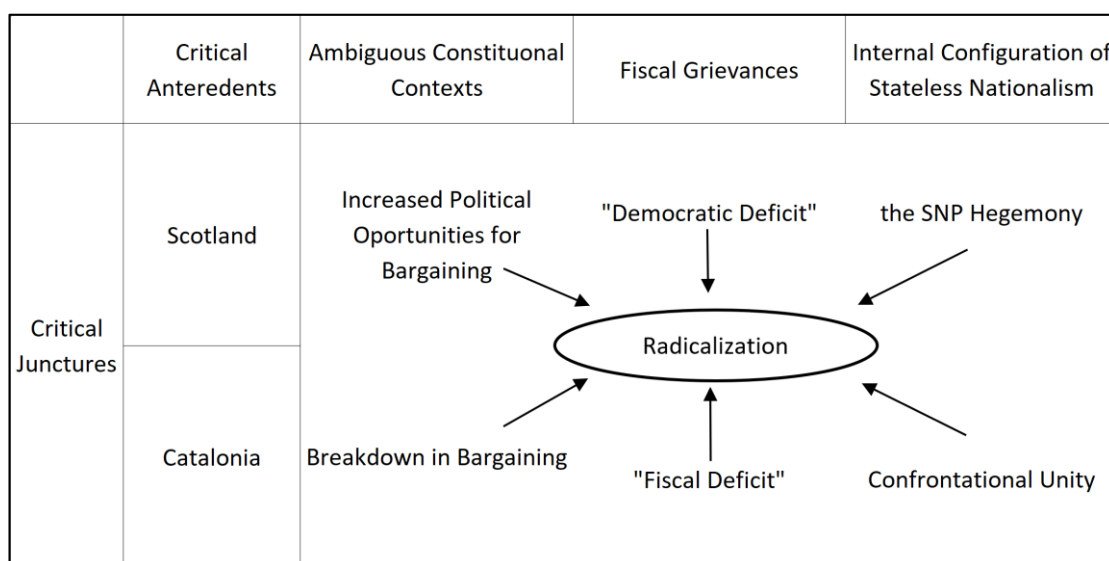


Figure 1. Divergent paths of radicalization in Scotland and Catalonia

The first critical antecedent influencing party strategies stems from the fact that, despite their differing constitutional contexts, both Catalonia and Scotland are part of larger polities with loosely defined territorial arrangements. The ambiguity of territorial organization coupled with the absence of constituent power for sub-state entities unlike in federal states, has made territorial politics highly susceptible to conjunctural changes in party politics. Every new political configuration in central or peripheral parliaments, and each shift in the balance of power among political parties, has rendered the territorial authority or status of sub-state entities open to debate and bargaining. Consequently, "constitutional ambiguity" or "ambiguous constitutional contexts" gave territorial politics with a highly dynamic and negotiable character in the interactions between the center and the periphery.

This common variable took different forms as a result of the differing approaches of central governments, as shown in Figure 2. In Spain, the People's Party (*Partido Popular*, PP), which came to power in 2011 with an absolute majority, adopted recentralization policies and categorically rejected the Catalan government's demands for territorial empowerment and/or an independence referendum. The PP's stance led to the breakdown of bargaining mechanisms between the center and the periphery, elevated public support for independence in Catalonia to historic highs, and became the driving force behind the radicalization of the CDC's territorial strategy. In the UK, however, the coalition government led by the Conservatives, who came to power in 2010, adopted a favorable approach to Scottish territorial empowerment and the SNP's demand for an independence referendum. The "increased political opportunities for bargaining" that opened up for the SNP pushed the party toward pursuing a secessionist agenda and unexpectedly boosted support for independence in Scotland.

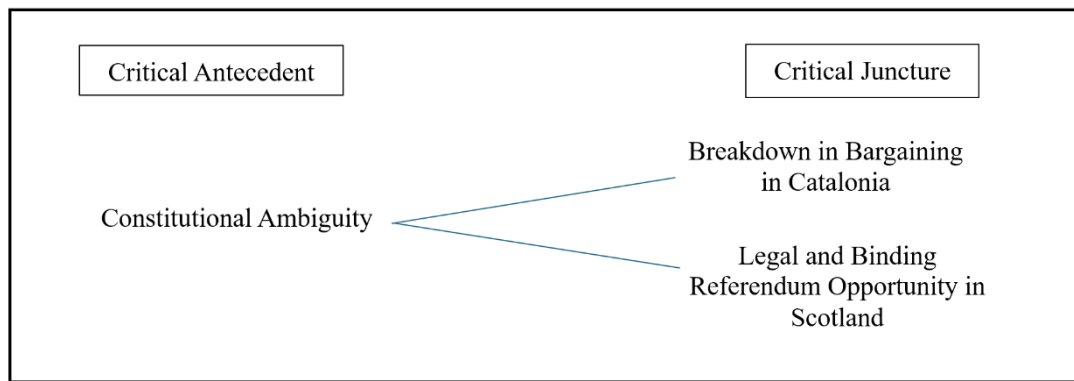


Figure 2. Variables within center-periphery cleavage

The second driving force behind the radicalization process in both cases was the economic tension between the center and the periphery. In both instances, the economic dimension played a central role during the referendum processes. The critical antecedent underlying this economic tension was the lack of full fiscal sovereignty for sub-state entities and the absence of clearly defined boundaries for fiscal authority, which reflected the broader issue of constitutional ambiguity. In the Catalan case, the persistent "fiscal deficit"—the gap between the taxes collected by the central government and the funds transferred back to Catalonia—was a primary grievance for CDC and, more broadly, for Catalan nationalism. While this situation might initially seem reasonable, given Catalonia's per capita income being above the Spanish average, it became highly politicized due to Spain's complex and asymmetrical fiscal system.

Unlike Spain, the UK's fiscal system did not create a fiscal deficit between Scotland and the central government. In the Scottish case, the central issue was the divergence in voting behavior between Scotland and the rest of the UK (rUK) and the dissatisfaction with the central government's economic policies. While social democratic Labour and the SNP dominated in Scotland, the Conservatives and their neoliberal policies enjoyed popularity in the rUK. This divide became particularly pronounced during the Conservatives' uninterrupted rule from 1979 to 1997, giving

rise to a narrative of contradicting "ethos" between "social democratic Scotland" versus "neoliberal UK." The SNP argued that Westminster prioritized the preferences and interests of London and southeast England, implemented economic policies driven by neoliberalism that disproportionately harmed Scotland, and that leaving the UK would create a "fairer and wealthier" Scotland. The SNP also claimed that the Conservatives, who had not been the leading party in Scotland since 1959, had no mandate in Scotland and that this divergence between Scotland and the rUK constituted a "democratic deficit." In this context, fiscal grievances were formulated as "fiscal deficit" in Catalonia and as "democratic deficit" in Scotland.

The factor that further intensified and brought this tension to the forefront was The Great Recession. Spain and the UK, among the countries most affected by the global financial crisis, implemented severe austerity policies at the central government level, which had profound impacts on the periphery. On one hand, these austerity policies created significant pressure on sub-state governments by reducing financial transfers to sub-state entities, making the issue of fiscal sovereignty even more acute. On the other hand, the social consequences of these policies deepened public dissatisfaction and made radical options, including secession, more appealing.

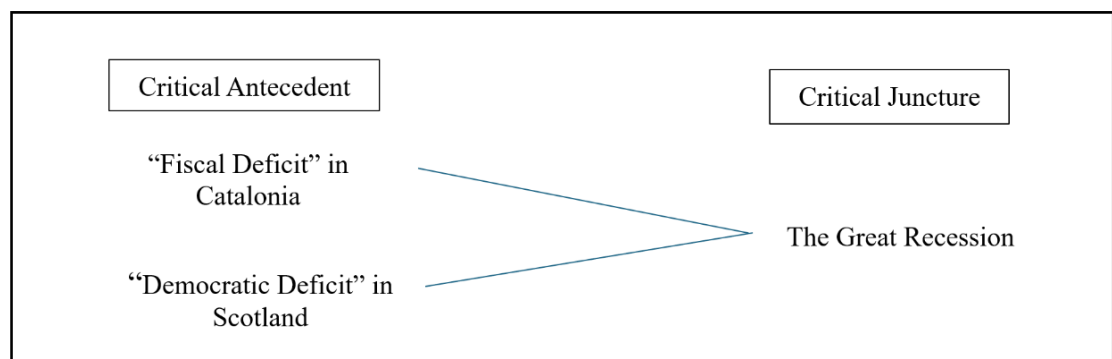


Figure 3. Variables within socio-economic cleavage

Lastly, the third main variable pertains to the internal configuration of stateless nationalism in both cases. Internal dynamics, both within the parties under study and within the broader landscape of stateless nationalism, contributed to the radicalization of party strategies, albeit in different ways. In Catalonia, the historically fragmented and pluralistic nature of nationalism began to reassert itself in the 2000s, following the end of the CDC's 20-year period of hegemony. While nationalist parties agreed on a common roadmap toward independence, they simultaneously engaged in intense competition to assert leadership over the nationalist movement. This “confrontational unity” among nationalist parties, coupled with the strong secessionist social movement, pushed CDC to radicalize its territorial rhetoric and strategy.

In Scotland, although other secessionist parties exist, nationalism has historically been represented by the SNP. Despite housing different factions within the party, such as gradualists and fundamentalists or centrists and social democrats, the SNP has managed to remain the hegemonic party of nationalism. Entering the referendum process as the governing party with an absolute majority in the Scottish Parliament was a decisive factor in this context. In contrast to CDC, the SNP's parliamentary strength provided the party leadership with significant room for maneuver in the (re)formation of its independence strategy. On the one hand, to attract social groups skeptical of secession and concerned about its consequences, the SNP framed independence in the most "moderate" way possible. On the other hand, the competent leadership of the SNP succeeded in making independence, which is ultimately a radical option no matter how moderately framed, appear "feasible" and "credible" to a significant portion of the Scottish public.

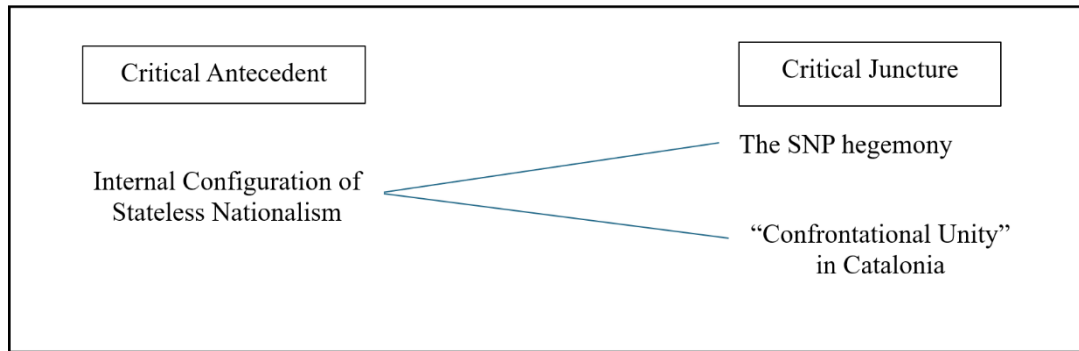


Figure 4. Variables related to internal configuration of stateless nationalism

Overall, this study argues that the radicalization of CDC and SNP territorial strategies can be understood by explaining these three common variables and their mutual interactions. Considering these common variables and their divergent forms, the paths and mechanisms of party strategy (re)formation are formulated as shown in Figure 5. For CDC, this blurry strategy manifested as a shift from autonomism to ambiguous secessionism, whereas for the SNP, it took the form of framing the demand for self-governance as an ambiguous version of independence.

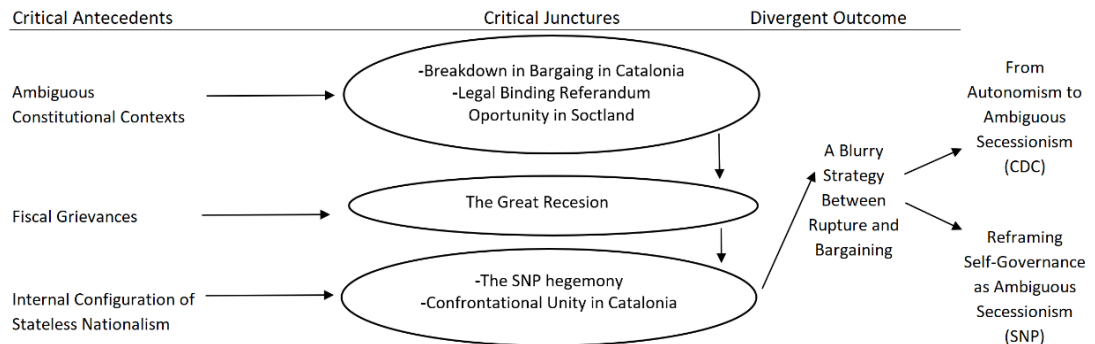


Figure 5. Divergent dynamics of party strategy (re)formation

Through the cases it examines, this study also addresses another critical area of inquiry: the structure-agency tension, one of the traditional dilemmas in comparative politics. By analyzing the dynamics of radicalization in the territorial strategies of CDC and SNP, the study aims to understand the extent to which structural and subjective factors influence institutional change and how these two elements interact.

Within this framework, it provides a detailed examination of the roles played by the center-periphery cleavage, the socio-economic dimension, grassroots movements, and leadership decisions in institutional change, as well as their mutual interactions in the process of strategy (re)formation.

This objective also brings to light another critical dilemma in comparative politics: the tension between change and continuity. How to identify change and continuity in the strategies of the parties under scrutiny and the factors affecting this tension? How do core concepts of comparative politics—such as antecedent conditions, path dependency, gradual change, and critical junctures—manifest in the cases examined, or do they even manifest at all? Consequently, another dimension to which this study aims to contribute is the tension between "event" and "stability" in the context of institutional change.

1.2 Chapter outline

The next chapter reviews the existing literature and presents the theoretical framework of the study. It begins by summarizing the key characteristics of SNRPs as a party family and then assesses various approaches to their strategy (re)formation, highlighting their contributions and shortcomings. Following this, it examines how secessionism has been addressed within the context of SNRPs' territorial strategies in the literature and explores its position within the spectrum of moderation vs radicalism. Based on this evaluation, it provides a definition of “radicalization” in relation to territorial strategy. Finally, drawing from the comparative methodology literature, the chapter explains the theoretical perspective on institutional change adopted and clarifies the terminology used in this study.

Chapter 3 explains the study's methodology and research design. It presents the data collection process, which relies on the process tracing method and fieldwork based on semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Catalonia and Scotland. Following this, the chapter outlines the rationale behind the research design and case selection. Finally, it discusses the potential contributions of this design to the literature and addresses its limitations.

Chapter 4 analyzes the antecedent conditions in terms of the variables that influence party strategies prior to the critical juncture. While providing a descriptive context for the cases, it also identifies and explains in detail three critical antecedents that mentioned above. The interaction of these three critical antecedents with the variables during critical junctures is analyzed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapters 5 and 6 address the dynamics of negotiation and rupture and their limits within the center-periphery axis. Chapter 5 demonstrates how the breakdown of bargaining mechanisms between the Catalan government and the Spanish state influenced CDC's radicalization from autonomism to a blurry secessionism in its territorial strategy. Chapter 6 explores how the establishment of self-governance in Scotland provided the SNP with "increased political opportunities" toward independence. It also analyzes how the party revised its independence strategy during this period, articulating an ambiguous secessionism and oscillating between bargaining (full devolution) and rupture (secession).

Chapter 7 shows how the Great Recession acted as a catalyst for the radicalization of party strategies. It examines how the severe austerity politics that emerged during the global crisis influenced existing tensions between the center and the periphery, facilitated the rise of radical alternatives, and how the secessionist

parties subsumed the socioeconomic dimension into their territorial strategy during this period.

After analyzing structural factors, Chapter 8 shifts its focus to agency, internal dynamics within secessionism, and the decision-making processes of party leaders. Emphasizing the critical role of agency during critical junctures, this chapter examines internal dynamics and leadership decisions as causal forces in shaping divergent outcomes. It illuminates how secessionist actors concretized rupture and bargaining in their territorial visions during moments when independence emerged as a concrete and actual political option.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUALIZING SNRP STRATEGIES

This chapter aims to critically evaluate the existing literature on SNRP strategies, present the theoretical framework of the study, and clarify the terminology used. In this context, it first examines the fundamental characteristics of SNRPs as a party family. It contends that SNRPs are rational actors operating within a multidimensional political space. In other words, it addresses the idea that SNRPs go beyond the territorial dimension in their policy-making and act strategically. Subsequently, it discusses various approaches in the existing literature regarding the (re)formation of SNRP strategies, along with their contributions and shortcomings. The chapter then unpacks the phenomena of autonomism and secessionism, revealing the dynamic and complex nature of SNRPs' territorial strategies. After evaluating the contrast, ambiguity, and fluidity between moderation (autonomism) and radicalism (secessionism) in the literature, it clarifies what this study means by "radicalization." Finally, it presents the conceptual framework and terminology used in this study to analyze the radicalization of SNRPs' territorial strategies, based on the comparative methodology literature on institutional change.

2.1 SNRPs as a party family

The concept of party family is grounded in cleavage structures theory, which stems from the political sociology approach within the political parties literature. In their seminal work, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) identified four main political cleavages in Western democracies. The "center-periphery" and "state-church" cleavages emerged as outcomes of the National Revolution, while the "land-industry" and "owner-

worker” cleavages resulted from the Industrial Revolution. They argue that these political cleavages shaped Western party systems in various forms, influenced by the unique national histories of each country. National-level party systems and cross-national party families developed within the framework of these cleavage lines (Rokkan, 1970; Seiler, 1980).

Based on this cleavage model, scholars have identified various party families such as social democratic parties, liberal parties, conservative parties, green parties, among others (Seiler, 1980; von Beyme, 1985; Ware, 1996). According to this conceptualization, political parties have a core dimension that reflects the political cleavage under which they operate. Within party families, however, SNRPs may be considered the most controversial category. The first dimension of this debate revolves around whether such a party family actually exists. For instance, Mair and Mudde (1998) argue that due to the heterogeneity of the parties classified under this family, the category is not useful and that these parties should instead be classified within other party families.

Indeed, unlike other party families, SNRPs can hold entirely opposing political ideologies, economic policies, or differing territorial projects (Urwin, 1983). From the radical right-wing *Lega Nord* (Northern League) to the center-left Scottish National Party, from the anti-capitalist and secessionist Popular Unity Candidacy (*Candidatura d'Unitat Popular*, CUP) to the conservative and regionalist Christian Social Union in Bavaria (*Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*, CSU), all these parties can be classified within the same party family. Despite this apparent diversity, however, De Winter (1998) argues that all these parties share a unifying core mission: “their demand for political reorganisation of the existing national power structure, for some kind of ‘self-government’”. In fact, the centrality of this demand

distinguishes this type of party from other party ‘families’” (p. 204). Similarly, Hepburn (2009) argues that the “core business” of this party family is “sub-state territorial empowerment” (p. 482). Such a flexible definition encompasses all parties that prioritize the territorial dimension, ranging from autonomists to secessionists. Among scholars of territorial politics, there is an increasing consensus toward adopting such a definition (Fagerholm, 2016).

The second dimension of the debate concerns how to name this party family. To date, scholars have categorized these parties under many different names. One group of scholars incorporates the concept of "ethnos," such as "ethnoregionalist" (De Winter & Türsan, 1998; De Winter et al., 2006; Elias et al., 2015), "ethnonationalist" (Connor, 1977), and "ethnoterritorial" (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985). Another group prefers the term "regional" or "regionalist" parties. Some use "regional(ist)" exclusively for non-secessionist parties (Hough, 2002; Hepburn, 2008), while others adopt it as an umbrella term encompassing both autonomists and secessionists (Brancati, 2007; Massetti, 2009; Álvarez Pereira et al., 2018). Another group employs the term "nationalist" and its derivatives, such as "nationalist" (Conversi, 1997), "minority nationalist" (Lynch, 1996; Elias, 2009), "stateless nationalist" (Guibernau, 1999; Keating, 2001), and "sub-state nationalist" (Brown Swan, 2022). In fact, each of these choices has its own shortcomings. For instance, "ethnos," due to its cultural and racial connotations, is a term not embraced by parties advocating civic nationalism (Hepburn, 2009). "Regionalism" poses challenges for parties that identify their territory as a country rather than a region. In Catalonia, for example, the term *regionalismo* is often used as a counterpart to secessionism. Similarly, "nationalist" and its derivatives fail to encompass parties that do not seek to represent a distinct nation but instead advocate for the "territorial empowerment"

of their entity. To avoid these dilemmas, some scholars have opted for terms like "peripheral" (Alonso et al., 2017) or "non-state-wide" (De Winter, 1994). However, such concepts may not sufficiently emphasize the core mission of these parties.

Since all these choices reflect not only academic concerns but also political inclinations, it would be naïve to expect a terminological consensus on such a complex, dynamic and over-politicized issue. With this in mind, and recognizing that an ideal terminology may not be achievable, this study adopts the term stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRPs) as proposed by Hepburn (2009). This term not only encompasses parties that identify themselves as regionalist or nationalist, but also carries a stronger connotation of covering the broad spectrum ranging from autonomism to secessionism. The adjective "stateless" also distinguishes these parties from majoritarian, state-wide nationalism as well as the regional branches of state-wide parties. To sum up, this study defines SNRPs as parties that advocate for and prioritize the territorial empowerment of their respective entities, characterized by an exclusive organization within a sub-state territory (Masseti, 2009; Alonso et al., 2017). Within this framework, for instance, parties such as the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (*Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya*, PSC), which maintains an organic relationship with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE), and Scottish Labour, a regional branch of the Labour Party, fall outside this category.

Despite their growing prominence in party politics in recent decades, SNRPs are not a new phenomenon. For example, the Basque Nationalist Party (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, PNV) was founded as early as 1895, making it the second modern political party in Spain. Likewise, Plaid Cymru was founded in 1925, and the National Party of Scotland in 1928, both advocating for the self-governance of their

respective countries. However, during this period, SNRPs did not develop into mass political parties (Gomez-Reino, 2008). Starting in the 1970s, a second wave of the rise of SNRPs occurred (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983). While Rokkan and Urwin (1983) classified more than thirty parties within the SNRP family, Lane et al. (1991) estimated 44 parties, and Fagerholm (2016) identified 117 SNRPs in Western Europe. Moreover, alongside the growing number of SNRPs, the electoral success and political influence of these parties have also increased, particularly following the regionalization processes in the EU and OECD countries (Marks et al., 2008). Today, many regions or sub-state entities are governed by SNRPs. These parties have parliamentary groups in national assemblies and the European Parliament. In some cases, they have become coalition partners in central governments (e.g., Italy) or have emerged as key players in government formation (e.g., Spain).

2.2 SNRPs in multidimensionality

The political sociology approach offers a two-dimensional political space for analyzing party politics, based on territorial/cultural and economic/ideological cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Proposing a historical perspective, it examines the formation of SNRPs within party systems by considering the development of divergent nation-building processes. When analyzing SNRPs, it considers both territorial and economic cleavages together.³ While this approach provides a rich and

³ “Around 1900, the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie and significant parts of the Basque middle classes and peasantry turned to regionalist and separatist parties to fight the parasitic central administration identified with the economically backward center of the nation. In the Basque areas, strong religious loyalties contributed to increase the hostility toward an anticlerical central government. In Catalonia, separatist sentiments could not repress cleavages along class lines. The conflicts between businessmen and workers, landowners and tenant-farmers divided the regionalist forces into a right (the *Lliga*) and a left (the *Esquerra*).” (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, pp. 42-43)

robust macro-historical analysis of the formation and evolution of SNRPs, it has limitations in explaining short- or mid-term changes and divergences.

As an alternative to this approach, scholars adopting rational choice theory have focused on understanding the strategic behavior and changes in political parties. The first generation of this approach developed a model based on the socioeconomic or left-right dimension. According to this school, political parties, whose primary goal is vote maximization, compete with one another in a unidimensional political space by adopting distinct ideological positions (Downs, 1957) or selectively emphasizing political issues from a constant political ideology (Riker, 1986) to win elections. This approach views the formation of new, unaligned issues as a temporary phenomenon rather than expressions of multi-dimensionality (see Elias et al., 2015, for a critical analysis). Scholars continuing to adopt this perspective, such as Ezrow (2008) and Meguid (2005, 2008), define new political formations, including stateless nationalist, regionalist, green, or radical right parties, as "niche" parties that operate within a unidimensional political space. According to this view, since the primary cleavage in society is the socio-economic dimension, these parties' primary goal is not vote maximization or winning elections. As a result, they are not considered strategic and/or rational actors (Adams et al., 2006).

On the other hand, while rooted in rational choice theory, an increasing number of scholars are attempting to bridge this approach with political sociology to provide a more robust analytical framework for analyzing SNRPs (Rovny, 2015). This perspective primarily rejects the unidimensionality of party politics and the framework that categorizes SNRPs as "niche" and "irrational" parties. For instance, Massetti (2009) examines the strategy formation of SNRPs across territorial, socio-economic, and European integration dimensions, exploring their interactions and the

reasons for strategic variations. Similarly, Elias (2009) investigates the multidimensional strategic positioning of SNRPs, particularly regarding green politics, and the shifts in their territorial strategies aimed at achieving electoral success.

Alonso (2012) demonstrates that SNRPs with policy agendas spanning multiple dimensions may adopt different strategic positions for each dimension. For instance, while SNRPs may develop a more rigid ideological stance on the territorial dimension, they might maintain more flexible positioning in other areas. Similarly, Rovny and Edwards (2012) assert that parties can subsume new issues by reframing them within their primary dimension. For example, mainstream parties might frame territorial issues in economic terms (Verge, 2013), while SNRPs may conversely integrate economic problems into their territorial programs (Masseti & Schakel, 2015).

Based on these insights on multidimensional party competition Elias et al. (2015) and define four party strategies:

a uni-dimensional strategy, where parties selectively emphasize and position on their core dimensions, while ignoring their secondary dimension;
a blurring strategy, where parties adopt vague, contradictory or ambiguous positions on their secondary dimension;
a subsuming strategy, where parties deliberately try to 'erase' the second dimension by framing the issues associated with it in core-dimension terms;
a two-dimensional strategy, where parties position themselves not only on their core but also on their secondary dimension. (p. 844)

This categorization provides significant leverage to explain the complex and dynamic nature of strategy formation and the diverse combinations between territorial strategy and other issue dimensions. In particular, the definitions of "blurring strategy" and "subsuming strategy" offer new insights for conceptualizing strategic shifts, strategic ambiguities, and the interactions between different dimensions. Another conceptual contribution in this regard comes from Rovny

(2013) who developed the concept of “position blurring” while examining radical right parties in Europe. Radical right parties have emerged as mass political entities over the past two decades, prioritizing issues such as immigration, majoritarian nationalism, Euroskepticism, and authoritarianism, which form their core dimension. These parties typically attract former voters of the center-right but also draw support from the center and even the radical left. To maintain and even expand this heterogeneous social base, this party family adopts clear stances on its core issues while deliberately blurring its economic positions. In doing so, they aim to appeal to voters with diverse perspectives, often projecting “vague, contradictory, or ambiguous positions” (Rovny, 2013, p. 5). This multidimensional strategy may manifest itself as “either a lack of a position, a concurrent multiplicity of positions, or positional instability over time” (Rovny, 2013, p. 6).

Koedam (2021) further elaborates on the concept of blurring by identifying three distinct sub-strategies: avoidance, ambiguity, and alternation. First, a party may simply try to evade an issue it deems too contentious or risky. Second, when a party does engage with an issue, it can create uncertainty about its stance by adopting ambiguous or inconsistent positions. Finally, unlike ambiguity, which involves concurrent inconsistencies, a party may distort its profile over time by frequently shifting its position on an issue through ideological zigzagging.

Rovny’s concept explains the ambiguity surrounding the second dimension of radical right parties. Alonso et al. (2015) operationalize this concept for both state-wide parties and SNRPs through the content analysis of regional manifestos, finding that both party families tend to blur their positions more along the economic dimension than the territorial one. Koedam (2021) applies it to the issue of European integration. Han (2020) argues that, in the face of voter polarization, Western

European political parties present clearer positions on issues that are prime for them but blur their positions on secondary issues. Thus, while this body of literature identifies position blurring strategies on the secondary dimensions of political parties, it has yet to problematize how parties act on their core dimensions within this framework. However, as the subsequent chapters will demonstrate in detail, this study argues that the ambiguity and alternation observed in the territorial strategies of SNRPs can be explained through the concept of “position blurring.”

To sum up, in territorial units where center-periphery and socio-economic cleavages are salient, party politics become highly complex. SNRPs face the challenges of navigating both multilevel governance and multidimensional political spaces (Hepburn, 2009). They participate in four different types of elections (local, regional, national, and European) and position themselves against other SNRPs as well as state-wide parties. These parties differ in their stances on the center-periphery and socio-economic dimensions. Their territorial strategies range from autonomism to federalism, confederalism, and secessionism. They also vary ideologically, with positions spanning from the radical left to the center or the radical right (Gomez-Reino, 2008). The next section builds on these basic observations regarding the nature and strategy formation of SNRPs, offering a critical evaluation of various approaches in the existing literature on the strategy (re)formation and shifting of SNRPs.

2.3 State of the field on SNRP strategy (re)formation

Despite the growing weight of SNRPs in the party systems on the European and global scale, interestingly, we still know little about their strategy formation in multinational democracies. While scholars mostly focused on the determinants of

SNRPs' electoral success and the party politics of territorial reforms, comparative works on SNRP strategic positioning are still very limited (Alonso et al., 2015; Massetti & Schakel, 2016). However, with the challenge to the approach that views SNRPs as "niche," "archaic," or "irrational" actors, there has been a growing number of scholars who regard SNRPs as strategic agents operating within a multidimensional polity. In this section, I analyze the key contributions and shortcomings of scholars from various approaches in this field.

2.3.1 Institutionalists

This school focused on the effects of institutional factors on the strategy (re)formation. Scholars analyzed institutional factors such as decentralization (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985; Brancati, 2006; Lublin, 2012; Massetti & Schakel 2013, 2017), electoral systems (Newman 1997), or party positions, that is, whether they are in the office or the opposition (Elias & Tronconi, 2011).

Studies on decentralization investigate whether decentralization boosts or lowers secessionism. In answering this question, some scholars argue that decentralization has a moderating effect on SNRPs' positions and weakens their electoral support. That is to say, once the center reacts to the self-government claims, these demands would lessen and SNRPs will eventually lose popular support (Levi & Hechter 1985, Rudolph & Thompson 1985, De Winter 1998). Other scholars claim that this argument is a valid one, but only for moderate SNRPs. They assert that secessionist parties will continue to exist after the decentralization reforms, and will use their regional-level powers to strengthen their goal of independence (Brancati, 2009; Alonso, 2012; Massetti & Schakel 2013, 2017). One may present relevant cases for either argument, but neither of them holds ground as a general argument

vis-à-vis the relationship between decentralization and secessionism (Sorens, 2005; Lublin, 2012). The Catalan and Scottish cases, for instance, serve as examples that can be used to support opposing arguments at different time periods. The first 20 years of Catalonia's autonomous community could be cited as an example for the accommodationist argument, while the subsequent 20 years strengthen the argument for radicalism. A similar situation applies to Scotland. There is a contrast between the first 8 years of self-government in Scotland and the next 8 years in terms of the legitimacy and/or effectiveness of devolution as a political project.

In his pioneering essay, Newman (1997) focuses on the effect of electoral systems on SNRP ideologies. He analyzes party ideologies according to both left-right and center-periphery continua within the political spectrum. He argues that majoritarian two-party systems tend to produce economically moderate but structurally radical (secessionist rather than autonomist) and unified SNRPs. Under proportional systems, however, it is more likely to encounter various competing SNRPs with different ideologies along left-right and center-periphery axes. This observation may seem relevant for the period that is under investigation (between 1960s and the first half of the 1990s). However, its validity has become questionable during the last decade. In Catalonia, where there is a proportional system, all SNRPs in the Catalan parliament have now become structurally radical following the secessionist turn of the CDC. In Scotland also, under a majoritarian two-party system new SNRPs on the left of SNP emerged (such as Scottish Socialist Party or Scottish Greens) since the new millennium. Although these parties are not real electoral threats to SNP, their strong militant base and their ties with social organizations have affected the discourses and policies of SNP (March, 2017).

Conversely, a growing number of SNRPs are taking part in government at both state-wide and meso levels. Elias and Tronconi (2011) analyze the effects of government incumbency on SNRP strategies. They argue that being in office has a moderation effect on the party programs. Additionally, Elias (2009), in a comparative study of Plaid Cymru in Wales and the Galician Nationalist Bloc (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*, BNG), demonstrates that these parties moderated their territorial strategies to increase their votes and achieve power within their respective units. However, the cases of Scotland and Catalonia again contradict these findings. This moderation effect did not prevent either CDC or SNP from organizing referendum for independence when they were in office and had deputies in the national parliament.

Overall, the institutionalist/rational choice approach could not offer statistically significant correlation between one specific institutional variable and secessionism, hence falls short of explaining the recent phenomena of the last decade. This underscores the importance of how “the context matters” in territorial and party politics (Rodon & Guinjoan, 2018) and highlights the limitations of institutionalist approaches based on multi-N regression analysis. Consequently, the importance of within-case and small-N cross-case in-depth qualitative analysis in theory building and theory testing reemerges:

A political science based on conventional analysis of variables cannot easily handle this – another reason for the neglect of territory in the past. On the other hand, idiographic case studies do not get us very far in understanding or explanation. Hence the best mode of approaching the politics of territory is often through the comparative case study” (Keating, 2011, p. IX).

2.3.2 Identity politics

Cultural and/or national differences are definitely some of the main determinants for SNRP voter support. In cases of Scotland and Catalonia, identity issues are extremely

important since both could be called “stateless nations” (Keating, 1996; Guibernau, 1999). Under this school, scholars analyze the effects of cultural and/or national variables on SNRP strategy (re)formation, such as having a proper regional language and/or religion, the distance between the capital of the region and the center, or having an independent status in the past (Sorens, 2005; Álvarez Pereira et. al, 2018).

Catalonia is a typical example of a territorial unit with its own distinct cultural and national identity. It has its own language, held an independent status in the past, and maintains a socio-economic structure that is autonomous from the center (Balcells, 1991). Catalan nationalist parties flourished as early as the beginning of the 20th century. Catalonia briefly experienced self-governance during the Second Spanish Republic before the repressive Francoist era (McRoberts, 2001). However, support for independence has never become a majoritarian tendency within the public until 2012 (Argelaguet, 2014). Moreover, regions like Valencia and Balearic Islands that share the similar culture with Catalonia, have been traditionally hostile to secessionism, and the SNRPs have never become fully successful in those communities. As for Scotland, even though a distinct language is not a differential issue (only 1% of Scottish population speak Gaelic), it also had an independent status in the past and “Scottishness” has always been a strong cultural identity (Mitchell, 2014). Since the 1920s, SNRPs do exist in Scotland. Nevertheless, just like it is the case in Catalonia, secessionism has turned into a real option only within the past decade in Scotland (Waters, 2016).

These examples show that cultural or national differences in and of themselves are not sufficient for understanding the territorial strategies of SNRPs, ranging from autonomism to secessionism. Instead of taking them as constant and continuous variables, one should attempt to demonstrate how and under what

conditions identity issues are politicized (Sorens, 2005; Serrano 2013). In other words, although issues around cultural and national identity are important to consider when one studies SNRP strategies, however they are not explanatory in and of themselves. Therefore, they should be analyzed within the given political context and thought in tandem with socio-economic variables (Serrano, 2013; Álvarez Pereira et al, 2018).

2.3.3 Socio-economic approach

The relationship between socio-economic factors and territorial dynamics, as well as the role of social class configurations within nationalism, have always been controversial topics in the SNRP literature (Keating, 2014). It is also an underexplored theme compared to, for instance, institutional or cultural/national factors probably because of its more complex character (della Porta & Portos, 2020). Some scholars contend that social class is subordinated to national identity and economic factors are not explanatory of national issues (Connor, 2001). Another and a more common approach is one that underlines the importance of different class configurations and economic structures in determining the orientation of nationalist movements (Hechter, 1975; Gourevitch, 1979; Gellner, 1983; Coakley, 1992; Beissinger, 2002).

Beyond these works that focus on the broader link between nationalism and social class, two recent comparative studies (Masseti, 2009; Dalle Mulle, 2018) merit closer attention. Massetti (2009) examines the ideologies and strategies of Western European SNRPs, taking into account not only the center-periphery cleavage but also socio-economic dimension and the effects of European integration. The primary aim of his research is to explore whether there is a relationship between a

region's economic status and the political positioning (on the left-right scale) of its most prominent SNRPs." To delineate economic status, he uses three spatial categories: bourgeois, working class, and scarcely industrialized regions. He defines bourgeois regions as having high concentrations of privately owned enterprises (especially those that operate in the rising sectors of the economy) and contributing more than proportionally to their state's public revenues. Working class regions are poorer than the state's average regions and are characterized by the concentration of heavy industries in decline, which traditionally employ large numbers of unionized workers. Finally, scarcely industrialized regions are economically under-developed territories with a delayed or arrested economic development due to lack of industrialization.

Based on his case studies and quantitative data set, Massetti argues that working class regions tend to produce leftist SNRPs, while bourgeois regions tend to produce rightist SNRPs.⁴ His work presents a valuable point of departure for a systematic examination of how SNRPs link socio-economic dimensions with center-periphery politics.

A major setback of this work is Masetti's assumption that each territory has only one single social class identity, which prevents him from analyzing possible internal class differentiations within a territory. However, in every unit that makes part of his study, there exist bourgeois, working and middle classes with different levels of influence on the political scene. Hence, the effect of these internal differentiations and struggles on the party politics remains overlooked in Masetti's work.

⁴ He further develops this argument in his article along with his colleague Schakel (Massetti & Schakel, 2015).

Dalle Mulle (2018) similarly focuses on discourses and strategies of “separatist parties” in four different regions: Catalonia, Flanders, Northern Italy and Scotland. He conceptualizes the rise of SNRPs under Western democracies as “nationalism of the rich,” which he defines as “a type of nationalist discourse that seeks to end the economic ‘exploitation’ suffered by a group of people represented as a wealthy nation and supposedly carried out by the populations of poorer regions and/or by inefficient state administrations” (Dalle Mulle, 2018, p. 2). This “new phenomenon,” he claims, is peculiar to societies where a complex system of national distribution has already been established and the constant economic growth have already been accepted as the main legitimizing principle of government.

Dalle Mulle also argues that, without underestimating the importance of cultural and political arguments, the economic dimension has acquired an unprecedented primacy within this type of nationalism compared to the nationalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His in-depth examination sheds light on the complex combination of issues such as fiscal transfers and redistribution policies, or cultural and political demands that make part of the discourses of SNRPs.

Despite its strengths, Dalle Mulle’s conceptualization presents three significant problems. First, grouping the Catalan and Scottish national issues together with the rise of Lega Nord is methodologically problematic. In Catalonia and Scotland, strong national movements for self-determination have existed since the early twentieth century. However, when examining Lega Nord’s concept of “Padania,” it is unclear whether it constitutes a genuine national issue or a self-determination movement. While it is true that certain party discourses in this region of Italy resemble those of Catalan and Scottish parties, this similarity in rhetoric does not necessarily imply that the underlying phenomena are comparable. Second, his

concept of “new nationalism” does not help us determine the possible internal variations within the territories under study — a similar problem to that of Masetti’s work. Dalle Mulle simply chooses one specific party from each unit and shows us the common rhetoric of the parties of his choice. However, when we look at the cases of Catalonia and Scotland, we witness very different and often contradictory discourses and strategies employed by different SNRPs and, at times, by different factions within a single party. Third, privileging economic grievances over other claims does not help explain why these parties reclaim independence instead of full fiscal autonomy (Polese, 1985). In other words, whether these parties have a clear strategy for independence, or whether they aim for subterritorial economic empowerment is not problematized. To do this, one has to distinguish the rhetoric of these parties from their strategies and take a closer look at each. Thus, the “nationalism of the rich” can only tell us part of the story but it does not help illuminate the whole process. And, telling only one part of the story carries the danger of leading the readers to misunderstand the entire story and its complexities.

2.3.4 Social movement approach

Della Porta and her colleagues’ recent works on the secessionist movements in Catalonia and Scotland combine the bottom-up approach of the social movement literature with the literature on secessionism, and touch upon several aspects of this research. First, della Porta et al. (2019) examine the radicalization of the Catalan mass movement basing their data on the campaigns for the independence referendum. Instead of treating a referendum as an elite-designed and technical procedure, they analyze it as a demand and a product of a radical social movement. They emphasize the importance of grassroots mobilizations that are based on a dense

network of local assemblies for the rise of secessionism. Furthermore, they address the transforming effect of these radical and grassroots mobilizations on the Catalan party system, namely, their influence on CDC's changing strategy from gradualism to secessionism. This bottom-up approach is crucial for gaining a better understanding of how secessionist social mobilizations influence party strategies.

In another work, della Porta and Portos (2020), delve into the class basis of Catalan independentism. They challenge the idea that Catalan nationalism has a uni-class, bourgeois character. Their data demonstrates that the Catalan secessionist movement has a cross-class constituency, including sectors of the working class as well. They emphasize the importance of decrypting cross-class alliances to understand the rise of the secessionist mobilization in Catalonia. In contrast to Masetti's or Dalle Mulle's one-sided and reductionist conceptualizations, this approach carries a better potential for a comprehensive analysis.

Finally, della Porta et. al. (2020) deal with Catalan and Scottish secessionist processes that took place during times of economic and political crises. Popular mobilizations in Catalonia and Scotland for the right of self-determination resulted from a combination of socio-economic, political, and territorial crises that occurred simultaneously. They analyze how social movements and local organizations combined their project of independence with economic and democratic rights, and how they garnered further popular support under the Great Recession and the increasing crisis of political legitimacy of Western democracies. The authors contend that "the implementation of austerity policies along with a crisis of political legitimacy (and self-government) have facilitated the emergence of democratic-emancipatory and social justice frames for mobilization" (della Porta et. al., 2020, p. 156). They underline the importance of political pressure and mobilization from

below, which shifted the emphasis away from independence as an end in itself, turned it into a means to achieve a more democratic and socially just society. This framework allows a consideration of various discourses in favor of independence, for instance, one coming from grassroots movements and another raised by governing SNRPs, at once. Moreover, it highlights the effects of the economic recession and austerity policies as well as of the increasing weight of political legitimacy (or its lack thereof) in territorial claims. Thus, the work of della Porta and her colleagues, which explores secessionism in all its complexity and heterogeneity as a social movement, makes significant contributions to the literature. Building on these insights, this study shifts the primary focus from social movements to political parties, analyzing secessionism through the lens of party politics. In doing so, it aims to enhance our understanding of both the nature of secessionism and the interplay between political parties and social movements.

Overall, this rich body of literature from the last two decades offers important insights. First, it challenges the paradigm that conceptualizes SNRPs as single-issue or niche parties. By developing formal models and data sets and by examining case studies, it demonstrates how SNRPs act on multi-dimensional political spaces. Second, comparativists focused on the strategies and discourses of SNRPs in order to better understand their territorial claims, and their trajectories within multi-dimensional and multi-level politics. Third, political sociologists examined the role of grassroots movements and their effects on the party politics, the class character of secessionist movements, as well as the complex combination of economic and political crises and territorial goals.

On the other hand, this overview highlighted certain shortcomings in the existing literature. It pointed out the limitations of institutionalist and structuralist

approaches, whose reductionist and parsimonious analyses fall short of capturing the highly dynamic and complex nature of SNRP strategy (re)formation, as well as the inadequacy of culturalism in explaining strategic shifts. By examining structural and agent-based variables in detail and exploring their interconnections, this comparative study aims to address these gaps in the literature. The next section examines the very nature of secession(ism) through the tension between radicalism and moderation in territorial strategy as discussed in the existing scholarship and explores the meaning of "radicalization" within the cases under examination.

2.4 Secessionism: A radical strategy or not?

Whether through unilateral initiatives or bilateral agreements, the secession of a territorial unit signifies a political rupture within an existing polity, and, as such, secessionism indicates a radical position within stateless nationalism. Secessionist mobilization has the potential to trigger significant political instability and socioeconomic upheaval. With secession becoming a major political agenda, contestations with the central state may arise, the business sector may withdraw from the entity due to potential risks, and increasing political polarization and social mobilization could cause the nationalist political parties leading the process to lose control. In the event that an independent state is established, various challenges will arise, particularly in the early years, concerning international recognition, and achieving economic and political stability. For this reason, secessionism has traditionally been associated with ideological radicalism in the SNRP literature. For example, Newman categorized parties advocating autonomy or federalism as "structural consensuals" and those advocating independence as "structural radicals."

Similarly, Massetti and Schakel (2016) and Álvarez Pereira et al. (2018) defined secessionism as a radical ideology or form and autonomism as a moderate one.

However, in terms of territorial strategy, scholars have pointed out that this dichotomy is limited and that there is a spectrum between these two extremes. For example, Massetti and Schakel (2016) have divided radical parties into subcategories as “ambiguous secessionist” and “separationist”:

The former deploy discourses or put forward proposals which imply the questioning of state unity but are ambiguous in their stance, as they refrain from using clear catchwords, such as ‘independence’, ‘partition’ or ‘secession’. In contrast, ‘separationist’ parties clearly and unambiguously manifest their will to break away from the state, whether to form a new independent state or to (re-)join another. (p. 63)

This distinction is quite important as it highlights the complexity and ambiguity of nationalist parties' strategies. However, Massetti and Schakel classify parties based on how they label their strategies rather than the content of their strategies. For this reason, they classify the SNP as a “separationist” or “strongly committed secessionist” party (Massetti, 2009), even though its understanding of independence has changed multiple times and its definition has often remained vague, oscillating between advocating for home rule and full independence.

Jaime Lluçh (2014) also acknowledges the scarcity of literature on “the complex heterogeneity of political orientations within national movements and their temporal evolution” (p. 3). According to Lluçh (2014), there are three basic typologies regarding the different “visions of sovereignty” within national movements, “based on the disagreement on the degree of sovereignty the nation should seek” (p. 5): independentism, autonomism, and federalism. Lluçh further divides these typologies into subcategories, classifying first autonomist parties as “instrumental” and “teleological.” The former sees autonomy as a means, a “stepping stone,” for more maximalist goals, while the latter, although sometimes developing

rhetoric toward sovereignty, adopts autonomy as the ultimate goal. This distinction is valuable as it differentiates between the rhetoric and actual goals of parties and demonstrates that nationalist parties can act as strategic actors in line with their ultimate objectives. In this framework, Lluch cites CDC and UDC in Catalonia as examples of “instrumental autonomist” parties. He similarly classifies independentists into two subgroups: “pactists” and “principled independentists.” Pactists “are those who propose negotiating pacts of political or economic association with the majority nation, upon accession to independence” (Lluch, 2014, p. 151). The “principled” ones are those who aim for a complete rupture with the majority nation. Parties might also oscillate at different degrees within the continuum formed by these two extremes. In this context, considering our cases, Lluch defines ERC as a “pactist independentist”.⁵ Since Lluch's study focuses on the period between 1976 and 2010, the changes in CDC's strategy and how ERC's independentism took shape on the eve of the referendum fall outside the scope of his work. Furthermore, internal variation is not only found at the level of national movements, as Lluch analyzed, but also within nationalist parties at a more micro level (Hepburn, 2009, p. 490; Gillespie, 2016). As I will demonstrate in the cases examined, there may be more moderate and radical factions within parties in terms of territorial strategy. Similar differences can be observed regarding the socio-economic dimension.

Moreover, different tendencies may be dominant at different points in the historical evolution of parties. Therefore, alongside internal variation within stateless nationalism and particularly secessionism, another important issue is the temporal

⁵ Keating (2012, p. 16) also offers a similar assessment of the ERC: “Even parties supporting independence tend to present it in a rather attenuated form. Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya is for independence, in the long term within a new Europe; in the meantime its proposals look more confederal.”

variation of party strategies toward (de)radicalization. Scholars who criticize the literature that views parties as static institutions have examined how the strategic positioning of nationalist parties changes under various external and internal conditions. For example, Barrio (2014), focusing on institutional factors, argued that as a result of the dynamics within the Spanish multilevel political system (such as the failure of status reform and the Constitutional Court's rulings on the matter), the CDC abandoned autonomism and transformed into a secessionist party. Elias and Mee (2017) analyzed the variation in CDC and PNV's territorial goals by evaluating multiple external and internal factors in detail, concluding that these strategic changes were the result of a context-specific combination of various factors. Similarly, Gillespie (2015), in his examination of the strategic evolution of Basque and Catalan nationalism, identified factors such as center-periphery tensions, economic crisis, and party competition and their complex interactions without making any specific causal inference. Brown Swan and McEwen (2021), who studied the SNP's territorial strategy with a longitudinal approach, demonstrate how the meanings of self-government and independence have changed over time and how the SNP leadership has (re)framed self-governance according to shifting international and national contexts.

Meadwell (2009), in his article evaluating the interaction between institutional accommodation and secessionism, provides a sophisticated analysis of the strategic actions of secessionists and state agents through a game-theoretic lens, taking into account both the internal diversity among secessionists and the temporal variation. Focusing on the long-term strategies of secessionist parties, he argues that institutional accommodations (like devolution in Scotland and autonomous communities in Catalonia in our cases) are not always self-enforcing and stable,

especially in deeply divided societies. Without external imposition or manipulation of the costs associated with secession, these arrangements are prone to challenges.

In his scenario, Meadwell focuses on the strategic actions of “sincere secessionists” (gradualists in his framework) while taking into account the tension between them and fundamentalists. Fundamentalists push for immediate and radical actions, whereas sincere secessionists advocate a step-by-step approach, view short-term concessions as stepping stones toward independence rather than permanent solutions or political equilibrium. Considering the strategic interaction between sincere secessionists and state agents, especially in terms of time horizon, sincere secessionists hold a significant advantage. They pursue long-term strategies to secure new concessions on the path to independence, while state agents, driven by the need to win elections, are constrained to develop short-term strategies. If their move fails, the next central government has to bear the consequences; if they succeed, they remain in power. In this framework, strategic calculations based on incentives, transaction costs, and timing play a decisive role in shaping political dynamics. Finally, Meadwell, taking these scope conditions into account, points to three forms of political opportunism—one related to state agents and the other two to stateless nationalists:

- 1) The opportunistic use of secession as a threat by individuals in the group who are not secessionists in order to extract concessions from the state agent.
- (2) The opportunism of politicians who make concessions in order to improve their competitive position in partisan politics.
- (3) The opportunism of sincere secessionists with a plan who accept concessions in the short term in order to continue to organize in support of independence in the longer term. (2009, p. 233)

The situations Meadwell refers to provide important insights for analyzing the secessionist process. By pointing to possible differences and seemingly contradictions between the discourses, practices, and goals of actors, he reveals the

complex nature of party strategy formations and shifts. To summarize at this point, we initially saw that secessionism was identified with radicalism and defined as the opposite of autonomism; shortly after, we observed that secessionism is not a fixed and homogeneous concept, but a spectrum containing various differences. Furthermore, we noted that the positions of actors can change over time and, finally, that actors can develop complex strategies with short-term and long-term goals.

This conceptual trajectory reveals the complex and dynamic nature of SNRP strategies and shows that there is no consensus regarding their classification.

Considering these challenges and limitations, is it possible to talk about the radicalization of the territorial strategies of the SNP and CDC? It is clear that neither the CDC nor SNP leadership occupies the most radical side of the secessionism spectrum. Throughout this dissertation we will see how and under what conditions the CDC transitioned from pragmatist autonomism to sovereigntism and then to secessionism, and that the SNP's understanding of independence is quite vague and dynamic, with the party attempting to define independence in as moderate a way as possible on the eve of the referendum. Moreover, as Chapter Eight will examine, there have been strong criticisms of both parties, from within secessionism and from the unionist side, arguing that they opportunistically used secession as a threat, evoking Meadwell's (2009) formulation, due to the party leaderships consistently favoring the moderate option at critical decision-making moments.

Keeping these conceptual tensions in mind, this study argues that both parties have undergone a process of radicalization in their territorial strategies, and this stems not from self-labeling, the rhetoric of party leaders, or the content of party documents, but from concrete initiatives toward an independence referendum. This "practice-oriented" approach, defining radicalization by political and legal actions

rather than discourses alone, distinguishes the Catalan and Scottish cases from other examples such as Flanders, Northern Italy, the Basque Country, Wales, or Northern Ireland.

2.5 Change and continuity: Analyzing territorial strategy

A natural outcome of attempting to understand the radicalization in CDC and SNP's territorial strategies is to identify and explain the dynamics of change and continuity in the dependent variables under examination. Such an endeavor brings to the fore the conceptual tools and mechanisms within the literature on institutional change. Much like in ontology, the dialectic of change and continuity is, unsurprisingly, one of the most contentious topics in comparative politics. Considering ongoing debates and competing frameworks on this issue, this section presents the study's approach to institutional change and provides a rationale for the concepts employed.

The major theoretical debate on change concerns whether it occurs incrementally, or abruptly, or as a combination of both. In comparative politics, the more traditional and dominant approach has explained change through the "critical juncture" versus "path dependency" or "stability" dichotomy (Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2000; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). This approach, emphasizing the self-enforcing nature of institutions, envisions long-term stability punctuated by short-lived moments of disruption caused by exogenous shocks, allowing for change. Criticizing the limitations of this perspective, more recent theories have highlighted the importance of endogenous dynamics and gradual transformations in explaining change (Grief & Laitin, 2004; Weyland, 2008; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Thus, two distinct models of institutional change have emerged: one focusing on exogenous and sudden shifts, and the other on endogenous and incremental transformations.

Nevertheless, due to the complex nature of social and political phenomena, scholars have sought to develop theoretical frameworks that go beyond this dichotomy to explain cases that do not fit neatly within these models. For instance, Greif and Laitin (2004) propose a dynamic approach that considers the interplay between endogenous and exogenous factors. Central to their argument is the idea that institutional explanations should not treat factors as permanently exogenous or endogenous; rather, their classification depends on the time frame and the processes under study. They introduce concepts like "quasi-parameters," which are factors that evolve gradually through an institution's dynamics and influence its stability or change over the long term, and "self-reinforcement" and "self-undermining," which describe how institutions can strengthen or erode their own stability over time. Using these tools, Greif and Laitin show how institutions themselves shape what might initially appear as external constraints, leading to a more nuanced understanding of institutional change.

A more recent contribution by Gerschewski (2021) seeks to disentangle the "source" of a cause from its "time horizon" to provide a more nuanced conceptualization of "multilayered and sequential explanations of institutional change" (p. 227). He argues that "[t]he complex interplay and interconnectedness of political and social phenomena complicates the distinction not only between internal and external (location) but also between endogenous and exogenous factors (location plus generation)" (p. 220). To address this complexity, he proposes four typologies to explain institutional change within a two-dimensional framework, considering its origins and duration, as seen in Table 1: exogenously driven rupture (Type I), exogenous gradual change (Type II), endogenously driven rupture (Type III), endogenous gradual change (Type IV).

Table 1. Gerschewski's Typology of Institutional Change

Source of cause	Time horizon of cause	
	Short	Long
Exogenous to Institution	Exogenously driven rupture (Type I)	Exogenous gradual change (Type II)
Endogenous to Institution	Endogenously driven rupture (Type III)	Endogenous gradual change (Type IV)

Source: Gerschewski (2021, p. 222)

Types I and IV refer to the most commonly used models in the literature on institutional change. The former represents "punctuated equilibrium," while the latter exemplifies gradual change. Types II and III, however, represent what Gerschewski refers to as the "missing diagonal," situations that are less theorized in the existing literature. Type II involves processes that affect institutions gradually and exogenously, akin to soil erosion, and includes phenomena such as demographic shifts or economic sanctions against authoritarian regimes. Type III, on the other hand, resembles medical embolisms or autoimmune reactions, occurring suddenly and endogenously. In the context of institutions, Type III encompasses events such as military coups or abrupt upheavals triggered by leadership decisions. Gerschewski emphasizes the need for further exploration of Type III changes to better understand the role of agency and to challenge structuralist biases more effectively.

This study can be considered an attempt that fits within what Gerschewski refers to as "multilayered and sequential explanations of institutional change." Focusing on two cases to understand the SNRPs' party strategy (re)formation, a highly complex and dynamic phenomenon, this research takes into account both exogenous and endogenous as well as gradual and abrupt transformations. In this context, rather than categorizing this study under one of Gerschewski's types, it would be more appropriate to identify how these different dynamics of change occur in the cases examined here. If we attempt to disentangle the causal factors mentioned above within this framework, it is possible to construct a model as shown in Table 2.

3. Divergent Mechanisms Influencing SNRP Strategies

Source of cause	Time horizon of cause	
	Short	Long
Exogenous to Institution	The Great Recession (Type I)	“Constitutional Ambiguity” (Type II)
Endogenous to Institution	Leadership decisions (Type III)	Internal Configuration of Secessionism (Type IV)

Accordingly, the "ambiguous contextual contexts" in which both cases are situated can first be considered examples of Type II. As Chapters 5 and 6 will examine in detail, the constitutional polities to which both parties belong have impacted the strategy (re)formation of the SNP and CDC exogenously and incrementally. Second, the formation and evolution of the internal configuration of secessionism in both cases align with Type IV. This factor is explored throughout the thesis, from Chapter 4 to Chapter 8, sometimes as a secondary and at other times as a primary focus. The Great Recession, in this study, is identified as a catalyst fitting within Type I. While not a sole determinant of party strategy transformations, as analyzed in Chapter 7, it stimulated radicalization dynamics by mobilizing the masses and bringing the fiscal sovereignty grievance to the forefront. Finally, leadership decisions at critical junctures can be categorized under Type III, precisely as Gerschewski suggests. As examined in detail in Chapter 8, leaders' decisions influence the shaping of critical junctures and play a decisive role in how these junctures are closed.

To summarize, this study analyzes SNRP strategies by considering both incremental changes and critical junctures. Within this framework, another point that needs clarification, taking into account the ongoing debate in the literature, is how critical junctures are defined. In his seminal article on institutional change, Soifer (2012) makes a significant contribution to the critical juncture literature by distinguishing between permissive and productive conditions. He defines a permissive condition as "factors or conditions that change the underlying context to

increase the causal power of agency or contingency and thus the prospects for divergence," and a productive condition as "the aspects of a critical juncture that shape the initial outcomes that diverge across cases" (Soifer, 2012, p. 1574-1575). This distinction by Soifer allows for a clearer understanding of the differences between context and choice, or, in other words, between structure and agency during critical junctures. By doing so, it enables us to move beyond a simple descriptive notion of critical junctures and more rigorously distinguish them, in terms of causation, from the periods that precede and follow them.

Drawing on Soifer's concepts, it is possible to refer to the turning points examined in Chapter 5 and 6 on the center-periphery dimension as permissive conditions (see Figure 2). In Catalonia, the breakdown in bargaining between the center and periphery, following the failures of both the statute reform and the fiscal pact initiative, created a favorable context for the transformation of the CDC's strategy. Similarly, the realization of political devolution in Scotland, followed by the SNP's absolute majority in the parliament in 2011, provided a "window of opportunity" for the independence referendum. From this perspective, the economic case emerges as a second permissive condition (see Figure 3). Chapter 7 will explore how, with the onset of The Great Recession, the socio-economic and political consequences of austerity politics acted as a permissive condition, enabling the rise of radical options. Chapter 8, which will focus on the internal dynamics of secessionism and the decision-making processes of party leaderships, will then turn to the productive conditions related to the dependent variable (see Figure 4).

Another important debate regarding institutional change concerns "what happens before a critical juncture." Since a critical juncture does not emerge in a vacuum or ahistorical context, identifying the antecedent conditions that influence it

is of great importance. Beyond “descriptive context” and “background similarities”, Slater and Simmons (2010) develop the concept of "critical antecedents," which they define as factors or conditions that precede a critical juncture. Identifying these antecedents, "that combine with causal forces during a critical juncture to produce long-term divergence in outcomes" (p. 889), provides deeper insight into what makes a juncture "critical." Within this framework, scholars define two types of critical antecedents. The first category, referred to as "successive causes," comprises antecedents that have a direct and sequential impact on the forces at play during a critical juncture. They act as "causes of causes." The second category, "conditioning causes," influences the potential effects of causal forces at the critical juncture without directly causing them. These create predispositions rather than predestinations.

As this study will examine in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, the "breakdown in bargaining" between the center and periphery in the Catalan case and the emergence of a "legal and binding referendum opportunity" in the Scottish case are identified as critical junctures in the radicalization of party strategies (see Figure 2). The critical antecedent shaping these junctures as a successive cause is the "ambiguous constitutional politics." As will be discussed in Chapter 4, constitutional ambiguity has directly influenced the rupture and bargaining tension present during the critical junctures.

The critical junctures emerging from shifts along territorial axes became more severe with the onset of The Great Recession, as analyzed in Chapter 7 (see Figure 3). The combination of territorial and economic crises brought the issue of fiscal sovereignty to the forefront during these critical junctures. As Chapter 4 highlights, in the Catalan case, the fiscal imbalance and the complex interterritorial transfer

mechanism between the center and periphery—referred to as the "fiscal deficit"—and in the Scottish case, the tension between the predominantly redistributive, social-democratic preferences of Scottish voters and the neoliberal Tory governments at Westminster—termed the "democratic deficit"—served as critical antecedents.

When it comes to the productive conditions within the critical juncture, the decisive factors appear to be the SNP's hegemony in Scotland and the "confrontational unity" formed by multiple secessionist actors in Catalonia. Chapter 4 illustrates how the historical internal configuration of stateless nationalism acts as a conditional cause influencing these factors.

At the same time, this study does not neglect gradual change or ongoing processes. In certain areas, it demonstrates the evolution of incremental changes. However, its primary focus is on qualitative transformations in party strategies during critical junctures. Consequently, it seeks to identify the conditions that precede these moments and to understand the interaction between critical moments and their antecedents. For this reason, the study adopts the approaches of critical antecedents and critical junctures to explain the mechanisms of change.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“They push us to acknowledge and embrace ambiguity and develop approaches to studying a world that is often contradictory and incoherent.”
Simmons & Smith (2021, pp. 12-13)

This study examines the territorial strategies of the governing parties that led the independence referendums in Catalonia and Scotland through a small-N qualitative research design, incorporating both within-case and cross-case comparisons. As an alternative to correlation-based analyses, it aims to leverage the strengths of in-depth qualitative comparison to understand the strategy (re)formation of SNRPs - a highly dynamic and complex phenomenon. In this context, this chapter presents and discusses the research design and methodology of the study.

3.1 Case selection and research design

The starting point of this comparative study is the fact that two SNRPs conducted independence referendums within a close timeframe. It seeks to address the puzzle of how CDC and SNP, which can be positioned on the relatively moderate side of the SNRP party family, moved beyond the discourse of secessionism to take concrete and thus radical steps toward independence through referendums. This tangible initiative sets the cases of Catalonia and Scotland apart from other examples with strong SNRPs, such as the Basque Country, Flanders, Northern Ireland, and Northern Italy. Accordingly, this study focuses on the mechanisms of radicalization in the territorial strategies of CDC and SNP.

The Catalan and Scottish cases share significant background similarities, making them fertile ground for a comparative study. Both territorial units have a

history of independent statehood and possess strong national identities. Both have been part of Western European countries (Spain and the United Kingdom) and have operated under democratic and decentralized polities for a sufficiently long time. The rise of secessionism and the transformation of party strategies occurred within a similar timeframe, allowing for the control of the time variable. This enables an analysis of shared phenomena, such as the impacts of The Great Recession, in both cases. Furthermore, both entities have long had distinct party systems and, unlike the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, neither has experienced a history of armed conflict.

On the other hand, these two cases also have some important differences. First, while the UK polity recognizes the Scottish people as a distinct nation, the Spanish polity recognizes the Catalan people as a “nationality” as part of the “indissoluble Spanish nation”, or as an “autonomous community” in its concrete legal equivalent in the Spanish Constitution. Consequently, while in Scotland the referendum was legal and binding with the approval of the central government, in Catalonia the secessionist government carried out the process unilaterally, despite the categorical rejection of the central government.

Second, the historical background and the devolved authorities of the two autonomous administrations are different. Catalonia experienced short-lived periods of autonomy before enduring severe repression under Francoism. Following the democratic transition, it has maintained an uninterrupted autonomous government with gradually expanding powers. In contrast, Scotland obtained a devolved government for the first time in 1999, after being part of the United Kingdom for centuries. However, Scotland retained various autonomous institutions after the union. Within the framework of this study, the most critical issue related to this topic

is fiscal autonomy. The differing fiscal authorities of the two autonomous administrations have led to the problematization of this issue in distinct forms in each case.

The third difference concerns the internal configuration of secessionism. In Scotland, the SNP holds a hegemonic position, while in Catalonia, secessionism is more fragmented. The SNP managed the referendum process as a one-party government with an absolute parliamentary majority, whereas in Catalonia, the coalition government of the CDC and ERC led the process with parliamentary support from CUP. Nevertheless, despite the SNP dominance in Scotland, there were also smaller secessionist parties like the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and the Scottish Greens and played influential roles in grassroots movements and within the SNP there have always been two tendencies, gradualists and fundamentalists.

All these similarities and differences, as framed in the introductory chapter, offer divergent paths of radicalization in party strategies. Considering all these factors, how can this research design be formulated? Does it align with the traditional approach in the literature—controlled comparison—and its two variants, the most similar system design (MSSD) and the most different system design (MDSD)? This study leans toward MDSD since it focuses on the commonality in the dependent variable (the radicalization of party strategies, albeit in different forms). However, the various similarities and differences in the independent variables outlined above do not fit neatly into the "contrasting contexts" framework of classical MDSD. Can this design, which does not fully conform to either version of controlled comparison, still be considered scientifically valid?

The first influential categorization aimed at transcending the MSSD vs. MDSD dichotomy in comparative methodology was introduced by Skocpol and

Somers (1980). The authors identified three different logics used in comparative history. Among these, they regarded “causal analysis”, which employs classical controlled comparison methods, as the most valuable. In some cases, these studies use MSSD and MDSD together with the aim of identifying causal mechanisms or relationships. The first category outside this classical approach is the “parallel demonstration of theory.” This approach utilizes multiple historical cases to demonstrate the applicability of a given theory or hypothesis across different contexts. By focusing on confirming that a specific theory applies consistently across multiple cases, the dependent variable often represents the phenomenon explained by the theory, while independent variables may be assumed or implicit. Divergent outcomes within a broader common framework are not seen as weaknesses but as opportunities to illustrate the theory's explanatory power. Thus, while this approach resembles MDSD in its focus on shared outcomes, it differs from the classical model by not strictly controlling variables. The other approach the authors define is the “contrast of contexts.” Starting from similar points (e.g., religion in Geertz's [1971] comparison of Morocco and Indonesia), this model emphasizes how contextual differences influence processes or lead to divergent outcomes. The dependent variable often varies, and the independent variables are context-specific factors. Therefore, the prioritization of contextual exploration over systematic causal testing distinguishes this approach from classical logic.

A more recent contribution proposes combining the traditional logic of comparative methodology with more innovative and critical approaches from a pragmatic and plural perspective. Simmons and Smith (2021), with their approach termed “non-controlled comparison,” acknowledge the power and validity of traditional logic in explaining political outcomes and causal mechanisms while also

highlighting its limitations and political biases. They emphasize the shortcomings of these methods, including their inability to fully account for the complexities of political phenomena, their potential to reinforce colonialist paradigms, and the risk of oversimplifying diverse political realities into overly neat comparisons. They argue that “non-controlled comparisons” enable the exploration of political phenomena in more nuanced and contextually rich ways, fostering a broader range of questions and insights that might be constrained by the rigidity of controlled comparisons.

The authors highlight that numerous influential works in political science are non-controlled studies, and even several canonical works in comparative politics, were written outside the framework of controlled comparative logic. They find the lack of theorization in this context surprising. Among the consequences of this gap are scholars avoiding certain research questions or designs that could contribute to knowledge accumulation, or attempting to force these designs into a controlled comparison format. Therefore, "non-controlled comparison" is not a benediction of the arbitrary, heuristic, or speculative but rather an invitation to rethink causality and contingency, generalization and translation, the universal and the contextual, parsimony and nuance together.

Inspired by these theoretical and methodological insights, this study argues that, while it does not fully conform to traditional comparative logic, its research questions and design remain well-suited for addressing a complex and dynamic issue. By adopting a pragmatic approach to comparison, rather than "possibly artificially controlling for confounding variables," it seeks to "embrace and exploit tensions presented by complex causal or meaning-making processes" (Simmons & Smith, 2021, p. 16). Hence, based on this methodological insight, this study adopts a

comparative research design that examines how similar outcomes (radicalization) emerge through divergent forms of similar factors (see Figure 1).

In this study, the unit of analysis is political parties, specifically the party strategies of CDC and SNP. Within this framework, considering SNP as a case is relatively straightforward due to its relatively long history and consistent structure. CDC, however, is more complex in certain respects. Established in 1974 as a centrist and ambiguous nationalist party during the final years of Franco's dictatorship, CDC entered an electoral alliance in 1978 with the Christian democratic Democratic Union of Catalonia (*Unió Democràtica de Catalunya*, UDC). Under the name Convergence and Union (*Convergència i Unió*, CiU), this alliance participated in the Catalan parliament elections from 1980 until its dissolution in 2015. Between 1980 and 2003 and then between 2010 and 2015, this electoral alliance, which transformed into a federation in 2001, formed the Catalan government. Throughout this period, CDC consistently held the position of the dominant partner within both the alliance and the federation. In the 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections, CDC participated under the electoral coalition Together for Yes (*Junts Pel Sí*, JxSí), formed alongside ERC and independent candidates. In 2016, the party dissolved itself and was reconstituted as the Catalan European Democratic Party (*Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català*, PDeCAT). Within these complex dynamics, this study often refers to the government or electoral activities of CDC during its alliance with UDC as CiU. Similarly, after the establishment of PDeCAT in 2016, the name PDeCAT is used instead of CDC. Despite the plurality and complexity in naming, the case being referred to remains the same.

The primary time frame this study focuses on encompasses the critical junctures in both cases. For Catalonia, this period begins with the July 2010 ruling of

the Spanish Constitutional Court on Catalonia's statute reform and concludes with the symbolic declaration of independence by the Catalan secessionist government on October 27, 2017, followed immediately by the dissolution of the Catalan government and parliament by the Spanish state. In Scotland, the critical juncture starts with the SNP's decisive victory, securing an absolute majority in the 2011 Scottish parliamentary elections, and ends with the defeat of the independence vote in the September 18, 2014, referendum. For a more nuanced and complete understanding of these critical junctures, however, it is essential to examine the critical antecedents as well as the descriptive contexts that influenced them. Given this need for a historical perspective, Chapter 4 explores the antecedent conditions for both cases. Chapters 5 and 6, starting from the 2000s, provide context for the processes leading up to the critical junctures, focusing on the evolution of center-periphery tensions and the transformation of party strategies.

3.2 Data collection: Process tracing and fieldwork

This study synthesizes within-case and cross-case analyses, drawing on both historical and comparative approaches. In contrast to conceptions that see process tracing as an alternative to comparative study (George & Benett, 2004), it sees the two methods as complementary, as Slater and Ziblatt (2013) convincingly explain. With this perspective, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 examine the constitutional contexts and the evolution of party strategies through within-case analysis. Chapter 7 investigates the economic dimension and mass mobilizations, while Chapter 8 focuses on the internal configuration of secessionism and leadership decisions through cross-case analysis.

Process tracing or, synonymously, causal process observation is one of the fundamental tools used in small-N qualitative analyses (Collier, 2011). It is defined as “the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light

of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator” (Collier, 2011, p. 823) and helps to describe political and social phenomena and to evaluate causal claims. This examination may explain the change and the sequence of events by identifying critical junctures and crossroads in the process (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

By adopting process tracing tools, the study initially conducted an extensive review of secondary sources, followed by an analysis of primary materials. Accordingly, party documents, brochures, government reports, and memoirs of party leaders were examined, alongside a systematic newspaper scan. While these sources are valuable for understanding the historical evolution of party strategies and moments of transformation, they are somewhat limited for a study focusing on a relatively recent timeframe. Moreover, relying solely on written sources is insufficient to grasp themes such as decision-making processes and internal discussions or conflicts. To address this limitation, it is essential to utilize another key tool of qualitative research: in-depth semi-structured interviews. Fontana and Frey (2008) emphasize that interviewing actors or experts on the relevant subject is an important method of data collection. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews, conducted around pre-prepared questions, not only provide information on specific topics but also allow for the discovery of nuances, the exploration of gray areas, and the uncovering of cultural meanings (Flick, 2007; Angrosino, 2007).

To access primary resources and conduct interviews, this study required fieldwork in Catalonia and Scotland. Fieldwork is always challenging for researchers, and this study was no exception, facing numerous difficulties. The first challenge was the Covid-19 pandemic. The upheaval caused by the pandemic led to a delay of at least one year in the fieldwork. The second major challenge was

organizing fieldwork in two foreign countries as a researcher holding a passport of Republic of Türkiye. This organization involved securing competitive and relatively scarce fieldwork grants, as well as navigating complex visa application processes. Given the intensive struggle with bureaucratic procedures and the time-consuming nature of grant and visa applications, I believe it is important to highlight this aspect as a significant dimension of this academic work.

Following the successful resolution of bureaucratic challenges, I first conducted fieldwork in Catalonia from February 2022 to February 2023, as a visiting researcher in the Department of Political Science and Public Law at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) under the supervision of Prof. Pérez Francesc. This research was supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) through its International Research Fellowship Programme for PhD Students. During this time, I conducted over 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews with party leaders, activists, social movement participants, journalists, and academics. Among the party leaders and activists I interviewed were individuals not only from CDC but also from other pro-independence, left and radical left parties.

During this time, I also made efforts to gain access to CDC's party archives from the very beginning. However, due to CDC's closure in July 2016 and the ongoing criminal investigations against it, there was no centralized location where the CDC archive was stored or accessible. Even former managers of the CDC-affiliated think tank, the Catalanist and Democrat Foundation (*Fundació Catalanista i Demòcrata*, CatDem), had no idea about the archive's whereabouts. On the other hand, a former CDC leader ironically remarked, "What do you expect to find in the archives? Everything happened so quickly, and decisions were made not through

documented debates but through leaders' choices and discussions." This observation made the interviews with party elites even more critical.

However, I had the opportunity to examine various party documents, congress discussions, brochures, and campaign materials available at the UAB library and the Library of Catalonia. Additionally, memoirs written by party leaders about the process, as well as books published by journalists, provided a significant amount of raw material. Another essential resource was the archive of *La Vanguardia*, one of Catalonia's oldest and most popular newspapers. Its comprehensive analyses and reports, particularly on CDC congresses, the dynamics within secessionism, and the period immediately before and after the referendum, proved to be indispensable for understanding the process.

My fieldwork in Scotland took place between February and March 2024, during my time as a visiting researcher at the University of Glasgow under the supervision of Prof. Nicola McEwen, supported by a fieldwork grant from Boğaziçi University's Scientific Research Project. At first glance, the disproportionate duration of my stays in Catalonia and Scotland may seem notable. However, this discrepancy was not a deliberate choice but rather the result of restrictions imposed by scholarship programs and the visa challenges and travel difficulties faced by citizens of the Republic of Türkiye. This situation serves as an ironic and striking example of how agent-based political challenges impact the practical aspects of methodology and the process of knowledge accumulation!

It is difficult to describe the immense concern I felt about whether I would be able to conduct the interviews I hoped to complete during my relatively short stay in Scotland or access the sources I aimed to review. This anxiety was heightened by my experience in Catalonia, where, despite staying for an entire year in a field I was

much more familiar with and where I already had a stronger network, I was only able to conduct my most critical interviews only in the final months of my stay. However, thanks above all to the invaluable help and initiatives of Prof. McEwen, I was able to conduct 15 highly valuable interviews during my relatively brief time in Scotland. Among the interviewees were several SNP leaders, as well as leaders from Scottish Labour and the SSP, social movement organizers and activists, academics, and journalists. To access SNP documents during this period, I utilized the libraries of Glasgow University and Edinburgh University, as well as the archives of the National Library of Scotland. In addition to these documents, I also drew upon the memoirs of party leaders, books by journalists, and newspaper reports, particularly the archives of The Scottish Herald.

CHAPTER 4

ANTECEDENT CONDITIONS IN CATALONIA AND SCOTLAND

“We simply cannot make sense of variations in current alignments without detailed data on differences in the sequences of party formation.”
Lipset and Rokkan (1967, p. 2)

This chapter serves two purposes, one descriptive and the other analytical. Initially, I present the descriptive context related to the political parties I study and the countries they are situated in. To this end, I will begin with a brief historical perspective on the emergence of the center-periphery cleavage in Catalonia and Scotland, and the formation and/or evolution of the SNP and CDC until the early 1980s. Aiming to avoid the “infinite regress” trap, I intend to conduct an “informative regress” to better understand the strategic positioning of the parties under scrutiny. As Slater and Simmons (2010, p. 888) note: “Infinite regress is clearly a logical problem in causal inference. But the real problem in historically oriented social science is not infinite regress but unsystematic regress. When conducted systematically, historical regress can prove informative rather than infinite.”

In addition to the “descriptive context,” I examine “critical antecedents” that influence party strategies. Rather than serving as alternatives to critical junctures, defined as periods of increased causal possibility or heightened contingency (Soifer, 2012, p. 1574), Slater and Simmons (2010, p. 889) define critical antecedents as “factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture that combine with causal forces during a critical juncture to produce long-term divergence in outcomes.” This conceptualization helps to strengthen our understanding of institutional change and provides a more robust insight into what makes “critical” during critical junctures.

Keeping these conceptual tools in mind, I address three causal factors within a thematic and comparative framework, instead of following a chronological order. First, I focus on the constitutional contexts in which self-governments have emerged. The state formations in Spain and the United Kingdom, their democratization processes, constitutional structures, and national issues, entail significant differences. Nonetheless, both countries converge in having “loosely framed” constitutional regimes. In the constitutional frameworks of both countries, the division of power between self-government and the central state as well as the concepts of nation and nationality are ambiguously defined. This characteristic bestows a dynamic nature upon the national issue in both countries and bears great significance for our understanding of the negotiations and conflicts between the center and periphery. Hence, this “constitutional ambiguity” in both cases as an institutional factor emerges as the first critical antecedent.

I then assess the formation of economic structures in both cases. Both the United Kingdom and Spain, as well as Catalonia and Scotland, have fundamental differences from an economic perspective. However, prior to the independence referendums, the economic dimension was of primary importance in both instances. Indeed, the Great Recession functioned as a catalyst for radicalization in both cases. This chapter provides a historical perspective to understand how economic debates interacted with the territorial question and influenced party strategies.

Lastly, I examine the pluralism and diversity within secessionism through a longitudinal approach. Tracking the historical continuities and changes within nationalist political movements is crucial to elucidate the strategic oscillations between secessionism and autonomism during the pre-referendum process, as well as the strategy debates within secessionism. To comprehend the hegemony of the SNP

in Scotland and secessionism represented by multiple actors in Catalonia, we require a *longue durée* analysis.

4.1 Formation of center-periphery cleavage

The fact that both countries had the status of independent states in the past was an important element in the construction of modern Scottish and Catalan nationalisms. In the late Middle Ages, both Catalonia and Scotland were independent polities. Over time, each followed divergent paths and, influenced by various factors, became parts of more powerful neighboring states (Elliott, 2018). However, their integration into neighboring states did not lead to the assimilation of their distinct identities. Adorned with historical motifs, modern nationalism emerged in both countries in the first half of the 19th century, and since then, along with the economic dimension, self-governance has been the main issue of the center-periphery cleavage in both countries.

The Principality of Catalonia was one of the founding houses of the Crown of Aragon in the 12th century and Catalonia wielded significant Mediterranean commercial influence, thanks to its strategic location and naval prowess. The development of commercial activities through military conquests created a powerful merchant class in the Crown, and the economic dynamism was reflected in the political arena through the formation of political institutions that limited the king's power (Vilar, 1962). These institutions of Catalonia continued to function as autonomous bodies after the unification of the Crowns of Aragon and Castille under the latter's supremacy until the 18th century (Payne, 2011). Economic and political progress also strengthened the use of Catalan as the language of commerce, palace, and art (Balcells, 1996).

Similar to Catalonia, the “Kingdom of Scots” emerged as an independent entity in the 12th century. Despite various conquest attempts by the Kingdom of England, Scotland maintained its independence until the early 18th century. Scotland's first experience of union with England, a country far superior in terms of population and economy, came with the accession of Scotland's King James VI to the English throne as James I of England through succession. This coronation paved the way for the Union of the Crowns in 1603, a personal union that brought two countries under a single monarch but left Scotland's political systems distinct (Lynch, 1992).

Throughout the 17th century, centralization efforts in both Spain and Great Britain led to political upheavals and rebellions in the periphery (Elliott, 2018). At the beginning of the 18th century, the autonomous political entities in both countries ended in different ways. The newly established absolutist and centralist Bourbon dynasty in Spain, after the War of Succession (1701-1714), abolished the autonomous political bodies of Catalonia. Under the Bourbon dynasty in the 18th century, Catalonia lost its political institutions; however, on the other hand, it became stronger economically (Fontana, 2014). Thanks to the formation of a unified market economy within the Spanish Empire and the political stability provided by the Bourbon dynasty, Catalonia developed a robust economy based on trade and manufacturing (Fernández, 2008).

The union of England and Scotland took place not by right of conquest, but by the Treaty of Union signed by the parliaments of Scotland and England in 1707. For the unionist Scottish elites, this agreement was motivated by economic considerations and the promise of political stability, but it had profound implications for Scotland's autonomy (Ferguson, 1977). While it facilitated economic integration

and participation in the expanding British Empire, it also significantly curtailed Scotland's political sovereignty. Under the treaty, Scotland retained its civil laws, autonomous Church and universities, but the Scottish Parliament dissolved itself, transferring sovereign powers to the Parliament of Great Britain in Westminster (Mackie, 1991).

The significant economic growth that began in both Catalonia and Scotland in the second half of the 18th century was greatly accelerated by the rapid industrialization of the 19th century. Catalonia experienced robust industrial growth, particularly in textiles, which became the cornerstone of its economy. This industrial boom fostered a powerful bourgeoisie, which became a pivotal force in Catalan society and politics (Dowling, 2023). In Scotland, industrialization was equally transformative, rapid industrial growth in textile sector first, and then in heavier industries such as shipbuilding, coal mining, and engineering, centered around Glasgow and the Clyde Valley. Throughout the century, Scotland emerged as an industrial powerhouse within the British Empire, contributing significantly to its maritime and industrial capabilities (Devine, 2012).

While both regions experienced significant industrial growth, their economic trajectories diverged in the broader national context. In Catalonia, the growth of industries such as textiles not only transformed the economic landscape but also led to increased calls for protectionist policies to shield local industries from foreign competition, particularly from Britain (Vilar, 1962). Nevertheless, the protectionist agenda was at odds with the free-trade-oriented policies of the Castilian commercial bourgeoisie and landowners, who maintained their political hegemony in Madrid. This tension gradually evolved into an ongoing political conflict between those wanting to preserve the pre-capitalist status quo within the Empire and those desiring

to break away from the Ancien Régime. It manifested itself on the Spanish political scene as unstable political regimes, palace intrigues, and military coups throughout the 19th century and even into the first half of the 20th century (Trotsky, 1931).

In contrast, Scotland's industrial expansion was more harmoniously integrated into the British imperial economy. Unlike Catalonia within the declining Spanish Empire, Scottish industry benefited from access to vast colonial markets and resources, facilitated by British naval power and trading networks. The integration was so profound that by the end of the century Scotland had become one of the industrial pillars of the British Empire, with Glasgow often referred to as the "Second City of the Empire" (Oakley, 1976).

Parallel to industrialization, modern nationalisms emerged and developed in both countries throughout the 19th century. The initial goal of the Catalan political and economic elites was to influence Spanish politics and lead national-scale reforms. The first half of the 19th century was characterized by dual patriotism, summarized in the motto "Spain is my nation, Catalonia is my homeland" (Vilar, 1962, p. 146). This period also saw the emergence of a literary and cultural movement known as the "*Renaixença*" (renaissance). The *Renaixença* appeared as a romantic response to the centralization efforts of the Spanish state and its dismissive attitudes towards Catalan culture and language. This cultural movement revived and celebrated Catalan language and traditions, played a crucial role in fostering a sense of unique Catalan identity that gradually took on political dimensions (Smith, 2014).

Although less assertive and ambitious, the same period also saw the emergence of Scottish nationalism, significantly shaped by the cultural evolution from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, which fostered a renewed appreciation for Scotland's historical and cultural heritage. During the Enlightenment, Scotland

experienced a flourishing of intellectual life, contributing to advances in philosophy, economics and science, and integrating Scottish contributions into a broader British identity. However, as the century transitioned into the Romantic era, there was a distinct shift towards celebrating Scottish history and folklore, epitomized by the works of Sir Walter Scott (Finlay, 2022). Unlike Catalonia, where the native language is a pillar of regional identity, English — the official language of the Empire — became dominant in Scotland, and Gaelic never became a central element of Scottish national identity across the broader population (Mitchell, 2014).

Consequently, Scottish nationalism drew strength from the continued existence of its legal and educational systems, with cultural revival focusing less on resistance and more on rediscovery and pride (Devine, 2012).

Nevertheless, Scottish nationalism, like Catalan nationalism, began to take on a political character in the second half of the 19th century. Grievances that the Treaty of Union was not functioning well, that Scotland was not benefiting sufficiently from public resources, and that a special administrative structure should be established for Scotland began to be voiced in political associations or parties (Newell, 1998, p. 105). In response to growing dissatisfaction in Scotland, the post of Secretary of State for Scotland, established in 1707 and abolished after the Jacobite uprising in 1746, was revived in 1885, and the Scottish Office was created under the Secretary's responsibility. However, this step was insufficient to meet the demands for self-governance, and influenced by the radicalizing Irish Home Rule movement, the demand for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament remained prominent until the onset of World War I (McLean, 2012).

While the first political organizations in Catalonia were established later than those in Scotland, they were more plural, ambitious, potent, and active compared to

their Scottish counterparts. The first Catalan nationalist political organization, *Centre Català* (Catalan Center), was founded in 1882. It demanded the recognition of Catalan as an official language, the establishment of a Catalan administration, and maintaining economic protectionism, among others. However, this heterogeneous platform, whose aim was to regroup all the political wings of Catalanism, did not last long. Over time, conservative sectors left the center to form the *Unió Catalanista* (Catalanist Union). At its 1892 assembly in Manresa, the *Unió* adopted a constitutional text, the first synthetic political program of Catalanism, whose goal was the establishment of an autonomous administration in Catalonia (McRoberts, 2001).

A scission from *Unió* founded a new conservative Catalanist party, *Lliga Regionalista* (Regionalist League), in 1901 with the support of Catalan bourgeois and middle-class sectors to participate in the legislative and local elections that were going to be held in the same year. *Lliga* won the local and legislative elections in Catalonia and became the hegemonic party of Catalanism until the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930). During this period, *Lliga* pioneered the foundation of *Mancomunitat de Catalunya* in 1914 by bringing together the four provinces of Catalonia (Deputations of Barcelona, Tarragona, Lérida, and Gerona), which made it possible to manage the joint financing of public works and cultural and charitable services. Although *Mancomunitat* had a purely administrative character and its financial resources were extremely limited, for the first time, the Spanish central government recognized the distinct personality of Catalonia. Hence, the formation of *Mancomunitat* was the first step towards Catalan self-government (Colomines & Madaula, 2014).

World War I put a pause on the push for self-governance in Scotland.

However, the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916, the devastating effects of the Great War, and the growing socialist labor movement set the stage for the emergence of a more radical and powerful nationalist movement after the war. The rise of national liberation movements on a global scale in the post-war period, particularly with the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, also gave new impetus to Scottish nationalism (Devine, 2017). During this period, the first secessionist political organizations emerged, and the home rule movement continued to grow. The demand for home rule found widespread support, particularly among the rising Scottish Labour and trade unions. However, after the Liberal Party, Labour also showed its incapacity to deliver devolution. Disillusioned with Labour, supporters of home rule merged with the secessionist organizations to form the National Party of Scotland (NPS) in 1928 (Petrie, 2016).

The NPS was founded as a left-leaning party advocating Scottish independence within the British Commonwealth. Although the NPS did not win any seats in elections between 1929 and 1933, it achieved promising results, especially in urban centers. In 1932, a more conservative and moderate group formed another Scottish nationalist political organization, the Scottish Party (SP). In contrast to the NPS's independence agenda, the SP sought self-governance within the British Empire based on equal representation with England. While the NPS predominantly attracted members primarily from the working and middle classes, the SP was a smaller, loosely organized group composed mainly of political elites who were often also members of the Liberal and Conservative Parties (Finlay, 1994). Despite these differences, aiming to represent Scottish nationalism under one umbrella, the NPS and SP merged in 1934 to form the Scottish National Party.

The most significant development on the eve of the Second World War was the relocation of the Scottish Office from London to Edinburgh in 1937. Westminster parties, reluctant to undertake political reform, attempted to address social and territorial dissatisfaction in Scotland through administrative decentralization. However, this concession proved far too insufficient to appease grievances in Scotland. After the extraordinary circumstances of the Second World War ended, the national issue resurfaced (Elliott, 2018).

The same period was much more radical, violent, and turbulent in Catalonia. First, unlike the Great Britain, Spain remained neutral during the Great War, keeping the national question prominent. Catalan nationalism vigorously campaigned for regional autonomy, but after extensive debate, the self-government proposal was rejected by the national parliament in 1917. After the war, economic and social challenges took precedence over national issues. The anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labor (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, CNT) in Catalonia led powerful strikes to address these problems. As the radical workers' movement grew, the Catalan industrialists and the *Lliga* halted their autonomy efforts, supporting the central government's repressive actions against labor movements (Fontana, 2014). This period from 1919 to 1923, until the military coup led by Primo de Rivera, was marked by intense social conflicts and political instability, underscoring the deep polarization within Catalan society.

The military regime prioritized eliminating anarchism and Catalanism, dissolving the CNT, incarcerating trade union leaders, and banning public use of Catalan and the Catalan flag. It also disbanded nationalist organizations and abolished local councils. Initially, Primo de Rivera's regime garnered support from those seeking stability after political unrest. However, social unrest escalated over

time, and the effects of the 1929 economic crisis severely weakened the dictatorship. By 1930, the dictatorship collapsed, also marking the end of the monarchy. After the republicans won the local elections in 1931, the monarchical dynasty left the country (Vilar, 1983).

The municipal elections also meant the end of the *Lliga's* hegemony. Its alignment with the military regime and pro-monarchy stance significantly undermined the party's legitimacy. The victor in the municipal elections in Catalonia was the newly formed ERC. ERC became the hegemonic party of Catalan nationalism between 1931 and 1939 until Franco's military victory in the civil war (Dowling 2013).

The new republican regime in Madrid acknowledged Catalonia's autonomous status. In 1932, the Cortes of the Republic passed a law concerning the Statute of Catalonia. This autonomous status recognized the Catalan parliament and the autonomous government (*Generalitat*) and granted official status to the Catalan language. Despite the limited fiscal resources allocated by the Statute, the Catalan government embarked on ambitious projects in social and cultural policies (Balcells, 1996).

The Second Republic was marked by political instability due to sharp polarization between the right and left-wing parties. After a coalition of republicans and socialists governed for two years, the right-wing parties, including the anti-republican, extreme right Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Right (*Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas*, CEDA), won the 1933 elections, raising concerns among the left, especially after Hitler's rise in Germany (Broué & Temime, 1961). The inclusion of CEDA in the government in 1934 sparked uprisings in Catalonia and Asturias. In Catalonia, the president of the *Generalitat* Lluís

Companys declared independence on October 6, 1934, but this hastily proclaimed symbolic initiative was quickly suppressed, leading to the arrest of Companys and the dissolution of Catalan autonomy. Meanwhile, a significant socialist and communist-led strike and uprising in Asturias was brutally crushed and remained isolated (Grossi, 2014).

Political dynamics shifted again with the Popular Front's victory in the February 1936 elections, which led to the reinstatement of Catalan autonomy and a general amnesty. However, the new government soon faced a military revolt led by General Francisco Franco in July 1936. While the uprising was initially resisted in Madrid, Catalonia, and Valencia, Franco eventually triumphed, leading to a three-year civil war and establishing a dictatorial regime that lasted nearly four decades (Dowling, 2013).

Franco's triumph marked a historic defeat for left-wing forces and Catalan nationalism. In Catalonia, his regime executed thousands and imprisoned tens of thousands, banned the use of Catalan in public institutions, and divided Catalonia into four provinces to align with the rest of Spain (Carr & Fusi, 1981). However, despite its repressive policies, Franco's efforts to forge a homogeneous Spanish identity around the Castilian language and “national Catholicism” ultimately failed. Abroad, nationalist organizations continued in exile, and within Spain, Catalan nationalism quietly persisted through cultural and religious groups during the forties and fifties. Jordi Pujol, the future charismatic leader of CDC, which would be established in the 1970s and become the dominant party within Catalan nationalism, commenced his political and cultural activities in such a challenging political climate during the 1950s (Balcells, 1996).

Overall, the socio-economic and political developments spanning from the late Middle Ages to the World War II shaped the nature of the center-periphery cleavages in both cases. Within these cleavages, stateless nationalist parties emerged and, over time, transformed into agents seeking to reconstruct them. Under the nearly 40-year Franco dictatorship, Catalan nationalist parties were forced underground and remained marginalized, while the SNP underwent a long and challenging experience, eventually emerging from marginality to become a major player in Scottish politics by the 1970s.

4.2 The SNP's long journey from the fringe to the mainstream

For two decades following the war, the political climate was not conducive to advancing territorial issues in Scotland. During this period, UK politics was characterized by intense polarization between Labour and the Conservatives, both reluctant to embrace territorial reform, and dominated by these two parties' political hegemony. Throughout this time, the SNP's organizational and financial resources remained severely limited, enabling it to field candidates in only a very limited number of constituencies. Consequently, the party's electoral performance was discouraging. However, the party entered a phase of steady growth, particularly from the early 1960s onwards, and this twilight period for the SNP ended with Winifred Ewing's election as an MP in the 1967 Hamilton by-election (Finlay, 2009).

From the mid-1960s onward, the political context became increasingly favorable for the rise of the SNP. On one hand, the post-war economic boom was waning, and the Scottish industry began to decline once again. On the other hand, the two-decade-long dominance of the Labour and Conservative Parties started to be questioned (Lynch, 2002). Moreover, the discovery of extensive oil fields in the

North Sea off the coast of Scotland in 1969 provided a significant boost to Scottish nationalism, infusing new confidence into its cause. As the economy and politics of Great Britain headed into a crisis during the 1970s, the SNP emerged as a viable political alternative, transforming into a principal political actor within Scottish politics. This shift was marked by the SNP's ability to capitalize on growing discontent with the traditional parties and to position itself as a champion of Scotland's economic and political interests, particularly in harnessing the potential benefits of North Sea oil for Scotland's development (Mitchell, 2009).

The foundation of this success was the significant enhancement of the party's organizational and political capacity starting from the mid-1960s. During this period, a rapid increase in party membership and financial resources fueled the growth of professional party staff and branches. This expansion enabled the SNP to become more active across a larger number of constituencies, leading to more effective and competent election campaigns. Additionally, in a time when economic and social issues became increasingly prominent, the SNP developed a more detailed policy agenda that linked the territorial issue with other policy dimensions, effectively integrating broader social concerns with the party's core aim of Scottish self-governance (Lynch, 2002).

Following the SNP's electoral success in the 1967 Hamilton by-election, the party achieved a significant milestone in the 1970 general election by exceeding 10% of the vote for the first time. However, the results were somewhat disappointing compared to pre-election expectations; the SNP lost in Hamilton and secured only one seat in Parliament. After the elections, during a period dominated by rising inflation and unemployment, the SNP focused its criticism on the central government's economic policies. The slogan "It's Scotland's oil" became central to

the SNP's campaign, effectively capitalizing on the economic issues at hand. The argument that the oil being extracted should be under Scottish control and used for the benefit of Scotland gained widespread support, particularly as the 1973 global oil crisis underscored the significance of oil revenues (Dalle Mulle, 2018). This economic argument became a cornerstone of the SNP's appeal, linking Scotland's profound economic challenges with the case for greater autonomy or independence.

This situation, combined with growing dissatisfaction with the Westminster parties, led to a historic success for the SNP in the February 1974 general elections. The party garnered over 20% of the vote and won 7 parliamentary seats, reflecting the deepening crisis in British politics. Neither the Conservatives nor Labour could secure a majority in Parliament, leading to a minority Labour government. The instability and fragmented nature of UK political dynamics prompted another election in October of the same year. This context further amplified the SNP's message about the need for Scottish self-governance, resonating with voters disillusioned with traditional party politics (Devine, 2008).

As the October 1974 election approached, the SNP intensified its campaign, positioning itself as the defender of Scottish interests against what it depicted as an ineffectual and distant Westminster establishment. The party's steadfast advocacy for Scottish sovereignty and economic self-governance struck a chord, leading to even greater electoral success. The SNP increased its representation in Westminster to 11 MPs, capturing 30.4% of the Scottish vote. These results not only cemented the SNP's status as a major political player in Scotland but also underscored its growing influence in shaping political discussions across the UK (Mitchell, 2009).

Table 3. Electoral Results in Scotland for the Westminster Elections (1935-2019)

	Conservatives		Labour		Liberals		SNP	
Year	Vote%	Seats	Vote%	Seats	Vote%	Seats	Vote%	Seats
1935	49.8	43	36.8	20	6.7	3	1.1	0
1945	41.1	27	49.4	40	5	0	1.2	0
1950	44.8	32	46.2	32	6.6	2	0.4	0
1951	48.6	35	47.9	35	2.7	1	0.3	0
1955	50.1	36	46.7	34	1.9	1	0.5	0
1959	47.2	31	46.7	38	4.1	1	0.5	0
1964	40.6	24	48.7	43	7.6	4	2.4	0
1966	37.7	20	49.9	46	6.8	5	5	0
1970	38	23	44.5	44	5.5	3	11.4	1
1974 Feb	32.9	21	36.6	41	8	3	21.9	7
1974 Oct	24	22	36.3	44	9	3	30.4	11
1979	31.4	22	41.5	44	9	3	17.3	2
1983	28.4	21	35.1	41	24.5	8	11.7	2
1987	24	10	42.4	50	19.2	9	14	3
1992	25.7	11	39	49	13.1	9	21.5	3
1997	17.5	0	45.6	56	13	10	22.1	6
2001	15.6	1	43.3	55	16.4	10	20.1	5
2005	15.8	1	38.9	40	22.6	11	17.7	6
2010	16.7	1	42	41	18.9	11	19.9	6
2015	14.9	1	24.3	1	7.5	1	50	56
2017	28.6	13	27.1	7	6.8	4	36.9	35
2019	25.1	6	18.6	1	9.5	4	45	48

The SNP's success was extremely alarming for Labour. In an effort to halt its decline in Scotland and to reduce the SNP's influence, Labour revived the devolution project. Despite opposition from some Labour MPs and the Conservative Party, the Scotland Act, proposing the establishment of a Scottish Assembly with limited powers, was drafted by the Labour government and passed in Parliament in 1978. The Act stipulated that a popular referendum be held for devolution, and it required that at least 40% of the total electorate in Scotland vote “Yes” for the proposal to be approved.

This proposal sparked considerable debate within the SNP and across Scotland. While some SNP members viewed the assembly as a stepping stone toward full independence, others feared it might become a cul-de-sac that would stall further efforts toward devolution or independence. As a result, although the SNP decided to support a “Yes” vote in the referendum, internal disputes hindered the execution of a robust campaign (Harvie, 2016). In the referendum held on March 1, 1979, 51.6% of those who voted supported “Yes,” but with turnout at only 64%, this amounted to just 32.9% of the total electorate backing devolution. Due to the 40% threshold requirement, the devolution proposal was ultimately rejected, leading to devastating consequences for both the Labour Party and the SNP.

Following the referendum, the SNP supported a Conservative motion of no confidence against the Labour government, leading to early elections within the same year. In these elections, both Labour and the SNP suffered significant defeats, with Labour losing 50 seats and the SNP 9 (Finlay, 2008). The election was won by the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher, a staunch advocate of centralism and neoliberalism. Her victory marked a significant turning point for both UK and Scottish politics, setting the stage for the next 18 years dominated by Conservatives’ policies.

In 1979, alongside the Scottish referendum, another significant vote on autonomy was taking place in Catalonia. Emerging from the Franco dictatorship, Spain had recently adopted the 1978 Constitution, which recognized the regime of autonomous communities for its various nationalities. Following this constitutional change, the Catalan people went to the polls to vote on the status of Catalan self-government. Supported by CDC's call for a "Yes" vote, the referendum saw a

participation rate of 59.3%, with an overwhelming 91.9% of votes in favor. This approval marked the reestablishment of Catalonia's autonomy after a 40-year hiatus.

4.3 Origins and foundation of CDC

The CDC, which dominated Catalan politics for more than two decades following the establishment of Catalan autonomy, traces its roots back to the 1950s when Jordi Pujol began his involvement in Catalan Catholicism. Under Franco's repressive regime, the Church stood as the final stronghold of Catalanism. It was the sole place where Catalan could be openly spoken in public, and Catalan nationalism implicitly thrived within Catholic circles. It was within these groups that the future Catalan political elite took shape. Pujol was a part of this movement, and in 1954, he was one of the founders of a collective known as “*el grupo CC*,” a semi-confessional, semi-political, pluralist organization without a formal name, whose acronym referenced both Christianity and Catalanism (Marcet, 1987).

He actively participated in youth and national resistance movements, and during an anti-Franco demonstration in 1960, he was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison. His imprisonment spurred widespread campaigns across Catalonia advocating for his release, catapulting Pujol to prominence as a key political figure in Catalonia. He was released in 1962 and resumed his political activities (Bassets, 2014).

Pujol held the belief that for Catalonia to attain political strength, it was imperative to bolster its "infrastructure," encompassing economic, social, and cultural aspects (Pujol, 2007). In line with this vision, he played a pioneering role in the foundation of a Catalan bank, *Banca Catalana*, during the 1960s and actively

supported the development of social and cultural initiatives within Catalonia (Pedrós, 2004).

In the 1960s, despite the autocratic Francoist regime, social and cultural life began to experience a resurgence. Labor, youth, and national movements regained momentum, and political parties operated clandestinely. During the first half of the 1970s, mobilizations against the Francoist regime spread widely (Dowling, 2013). In 1971, *Asamblea de Catalunya* (Assembly of Catalonia) was established in Catalonia, comprising numerous political parties, social organizations, and cultural entities. The Assembly's slogans centered around “liberty, amnesty, and Catalonia's autonomy,” reflected the growing demand for self-governance (Balcells, 1996). Given these circumstances, Pujol shifted his focus from “constructing infrastructure” to actively engaging in politics, leading to the founding of the CDC in 1974 (Pujol, 2007).

During the foundational period, Jordi Pujol's vision was to establish a Catalanist, democratic, and moderate party. His ambition was to “converge” various political currents in Catalonia, ranging from social democrats to Christian democrats, under the CDC's banner. The party primarily aimed to engage the middle classes, a substantial segment of the Catalan population, though the segments of liberal bourgeoisie and the working class also contributed to its foundation (Marcet, 1987). The final documents of the founding congress in November 1974 succinctly summarized CDC's principal political priorities, which included establishing political democracy, safeguarding civil liberties, pursuing social justice, seeking autonomy for Catalonia, and aspiring for integration with the European Economic Community (Gisbert, 2014a).

Meanwhile, Franco's death in 1975 accelerated the political crisis within the regime. Facing a severe economic downturn, popular mobilizations, and armed

attacks, the Francoist regime began a democratic opening. In 1977, Spain held its first free legislative elections in 41 years (Carr & Fusi, 1981). In these historic polls, CDC emerged as the third most popular party in Catalonia, following PSC and the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (*Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya*, PSUC). While the results initially may have disappointed some within the CDC, they were sufficient for the party to play a pivotal role in the parliamentary and constitutional drafting process. Miquel Roca Junyent, a CDC parliamentarian and deputy general secretary, represented Catalan and Basque nationalist parties on the 7-person commission tasked with drafting the constitution (Balcells, 1996).

The period from CDC's establishment in 1974 to the Catalan regional elections in 1980 was a formative phase during which the party solidified its programmatic and organizational structures, shaping its trajectory for subsequent years. During this time, the party experienced steady growth, expanding its presence across all provinces of Catalonia. Notably, electoral support and organizational strength were greater in small and medium-sized cities, where Catalanism was more prominent, in contrast to multicultural metropolitan centers like Barcelona or Tarragona (Marcet, 1987).

In 1978, CDC broadened its political spectrum by merging with the liberal-leaning EDC (*Esquerra Democràtica de Catalunya* – Democratic Left of Catalonia) and forming an electoral alliance with the Christian democratic UDC. This period also saw the rise of the PSC as a strong socialist party occupying the center-left space, prompting CDC to shift from a center-left to a more centrist stance, now marked by a market-oriented economic program (Barberà & Barrio, 2006).

Pragmatism and negotiation have been enduring characteristics of CDC from its inception. The party consistently demonstrated openness to collaborations and

agreements with parties of various ideological backgrounds. For example, after the 1977 elections, it established close relations with the center-right Union of Democratic Center (*Unión de Centro Democrático*, UCD), a party founded by reformist Francoists that governed the country for five years. Additionally, following the 1979 local elections, CDC forged agreements with socialists and communists to manage several municipal councils (Marcet 2017).

In March 1980, CDC contested the regional elections under the joint banner of CiU⁶, symbolizing its electoral alliance with UDC. CiU campaign positioned itself as the “broad church” for Catalan nationalism, presenting an alternative to the existing left-right polarization epitomized by PSC and PSUC on one side, and UCD on the other (Dowling, 2013). Advocating a possibilist and pragmatic approach to Catalonia's self-governance, CiU also leveraged the charismatic and popular persona of Jordi Pujol, attempting to identify him with Catalan nationalism. Contrary to expectations that PSC would dominate following its successes in the 1977 and 1979 elections, CiU emerged as the leading coalition in the 1980 autonomy elections. CiU secured 27.7% of the popular vote and obtained 43 seats in the 135-seat parliament. Jordi Pujol was elected as the President of the Generalitat, thanks to the support of deputies from UCD and the ERC during his investiture.

⁶ The CDC, as the predominant partner in CiU, participated in elections under the CiU umbrella from 1980 to 2015, and the governments it formed were referred to as CiU governments. Therefore, the terms CiU and CDC are mostly used interchangeably in the subsequent text.

Table 4. The Catalan Parliament Elections (1980-1999)

Year	CiU	PSC	ERC	PSUC/	UCD	AP/PP	Part.
1980	27.7	22.3	8.9	18.7	10.5	2.3	62.1
1984	46.6	30.2	4.4	5.6		7.7	64.2
1988	45.4	29.6	4.2	7.7	3.9	5.3	59.4
1992	46.2	27.4	7.9	6.5		5.9	54.9
1995	41.0	24.9	9.5	9.7		13.1	63.6
1999	37.7	37.9	8.7	2.5		9.5	59.2

The next two decades in Catalonia were marked by the institutionalization and expansion of autonomy under the hegemony of CDC, while Scotland suffered under the centralist Conservative administration, which remained in power until 1997. The SNP struggled through a crisis-ridden 1980s but recovered in the 1990s to become an effective political force again. The accession of the Labour Party to power in 1997, with promises of devolution, heralded a new era in Scottish politics. The political developments during these two decades were crucial in defining the limits of self-governance in both countries.

4.4 Self-governance in constitutional contexts

The constitutional forms and paths of the United Kingdom and Spain contain significant differences. Firstly, the Spanish state, which inherits a political legacy defined by coups, dictatorships, and political upheavals, is governed by a constitution ratified in 1978 after 40 years of Francoism. In contrast, the United Kingdom is exceptional in not possessing a codified constitution consolidated in a single document. Instead, it operates under a durable liberal democratic polity shaped by various constitutional documents and political evolution over the centuries (Leyland, 2021).

In this context, the territorial organization and multilevel governance of both countries exhibit various differences. Spain has autonomous communities as defined by the 1978 Constitution, while the United Kingdom adopted a decentralized form with the establishment of parliaments, and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland⁷ in 1999 through devolution Acts passed in 1998. However, regarding territorial matters, both countries share a significant common feature. Although in different forms, the politics of both nations are characterized by flexibility, vagueness, asymmetry, and thus a dynamic structure.

This feature is quite evident for the United Kingdom, which does not have a codified constitution. The territorial structure of the country and the powers of the devolved administrations can be altered by laws approved in Westminster. Thus, any change in the political balances at the center or the periphery may initiate a negotiation process to redefine the relationship between them. Despite having a written constitution, Spanish politics exhibits a similar characteristic due to the particularly ill-defined nature of its territorial provisions. The ambiguous, flexible, and dynamic territorial structures of both countries are of great importance for understanding the tension between the center and the periphery, as well as the oscillation between rupture and bargaining experienced by stateless nationalist parties. Therefore, this section will briefly touch upon the constitutional contexts and political developments that shaped the limits of self-governance during the 1980s and 1990s.

⁷ As early as 1920, the Government of Ireland Act granted Northern Ireland a devolved parliament. However, the structure of the system, which made it impossible for the Catholic community to be represented in government, failed to achieve political stability. Following the escalation of political violence with the rise of the Irish Republican Army, which advocated for unification with the Republic of Ireland, the devolved system in Northern Ireland was suspended in 1972 (Leyland, 2021: 230).

4.4.1 From “democratic deficit” to the Scottish Parliament

The failure of the devolution attempt in 1979, followed by the Thatcher government, postponed Scotland's achievement of Home Rule by two decades. Thatcher's neoliberal policies, which led to deindustrialization and a rise in unemployment, hit Scotland particularly hard, an entity heavily dependent on heavy industries and mining. Consequently, the Scottish Conservatives' share of the vote steadily declined throughout the 1980s. A significant turning point occurred in 1988 when Thatcher preemptively introduced the “Poll Tax” in Scotland a year before implementing it in England. This experimental decision sparked widespread social mobilization and symbolized the Conservative government's disregard for Scottish interests.

The 18 years of uninterrupted Tory rule also led to the emergence of the concept of a “democratic deficit” in Scotland (Dalle Mulle, 2018, p. 127). The majority of the Scottish people were no longer willing to be governed any longer by the Conservatives, who had not been a majority party in Scotland since 1959 and whose support had steadily declined during the Thatcher era (Finlay, 2012). This sentiment gave a new impetus to Scottish nationalism and the cause of home rule, while also fostering a stereotypical polarization between a “neoliberal, individualist” England and a “social democratic, statist” Scotland, that manifested itself in divergent voting patterns (McEwen, 2002).

The SNP spent the 1980s grappling with crises and intense debates over its strategies in various areas, but by the end of the decade, it began to recover. The first sign of its resurgence, much like in 1967, emerged from a by-election. In Govan, traditionally a Labour stronghold, SNP candidate Jim Sillars was elected as an MP. This victory not only gave a new impetus to the SNP but also compelled Labour to adopt an irrevocable and clear stance on devolution. John Swinney, the current leader

of the SNP and First Minister of the Scottish Government since May 2024, who has been an SNP activist since 1979 and its president between 2000 and 2004, recalls that period as follows:

I would identify the Govan by-election as the moment the SNP began to perform better electorally, and thereafter, the events of the 1990s took of course, and gradually over support rose. The crucial thing about the Govan by-election was that it terrified the Labour Party that the SNP won it. So that prompted the Labour Party to become firmly, unequivocally supportive of a Scottish Parliament being established. (Author Interview with John Swinney, 05.03.2024)

In the 1992 elections, the SNP successfully exceeded the 20% vote share in Scotland, proving the end of the interregnum. However, contrary to expectations, Labour, campaigning on a promise of devolution, lost and the Conservatives won the elections again, creating disappointment in Scotland but also energizing the nationalist grassroots movement. Some of the SNP's future key figures became politically active during this period. Stephen Noon, a long-time political advisor to the SNP and the Scottish government until 2015, and the chief strategist of the Yes Campaign during the referendum process, remembers that time saying:

So in 1992, there was an expectation that Labour Party would win the election in the UK. Labor had promised to deliver a Scottish Parliament. But of course, in 1992, the Conservatives surprisingly won the election, and there was a really quite visceral response in Scotland. Various groups were set up. There was a big rally in Glasgow on the day after the election, which led to the creation of a group called Scotland United. And Scotland United was mainly Labour MP's, but it was a cross party, non-party campaign organization. And it was campaigning for a multi-option referendum in Scotland. A parliament or independence. It was going to be between the status quo, Scottish Parliament, independence. So, I got involved in that. That was my entry into the world of Scottish politics and through that, got to know people in the SNP. I was, over those few years, persuaded of the case for independence. (Author Interview with Stephen Noon, 19.02.2024)

During this period, the SNP took a clear stance on devolution, unlike in the 1970s, viewing the establishment of the Scottish Parliament as a step towards independence (Brown Swan & McEwen, 2021). The 1997 elections, won by Labour, which was

committed to devolution, marked a new era in Scottish politics. In these elections, the SNP increased its vote and number of MPs, achieving a successful outcome, while the Conservatives, despite receiving 17.5% of the vote in Scotland, failed to win any seats, marking their worst performance in history.

Immediately after coming to power, Labour organized a referendum on devolution in Scotland. The referendum, held in September 1997, asked voters two questions: whether they supported the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and, if established, whether that Parliament should have tax-varying powers. With a participation rate of 60%, the referendum resulted in a majority "Yes" response to both questions, leading to the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament after nearly two centuries.

Following the referendum, Westminster passed the Scotland Act 1998, which set out the limits of devolution. The Act detailed the powers that remained under Westminster's control beyond those devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish administration had the right to exercise authority in areas not reserved to Westminster. Reserved areas included defense, international relations, currency, and immigration, as well as energy, employment, and transport. Health, education, local government, and social services were devolved to the Scottish Executive (Lynch, 2001, p. 16). A notable aspect of the Act was that it did not grant fiscal autonomy to the Scottish Government. The devolved government's budget was primarily made up of block grants from the central budget, and although it had the power to increase income tax by 3%, this option was difficult to implement due to its potential complexity and unpopularity (Jackson, 1999).

Another significant feature of the Act was the definition of a specific electoral system for Scotland. A mixed electoral system was introduced, based on a

combination of the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system used for Westminster elections and the regional list system used for European Parliament elections. Under this system, 57% of the 129-member parliament would be elected via the FPTP system, while 43% would be elected through regional lists. The logic behind this formula, which was devised under the leadership of the Labour Party, was to prevent any party from gaining an absolute majority in Parliament. Consequently, it was intended to block a potential future sole SNP government (Lynch, 2001, p. 21-22).

The first elections for the Scottish Parliament in May 1999 resulted in a victory for the Labour Party. Scottish Labour formed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, who came fourth behind the Conservatives with 17 seats, to establish Scotland's first government. The SNP, with 28% of the vote, secured 35 seats and became the main opposition party in Parliament. All in all, although the Scottish Parliament was inaugurated with limited powers and the SNP did not win the Scottish government it had hoped for in the very first elections, the establishment of Scottish self-governance represented the opening of a historical opportunity structure for the SNP and its gradualist strategy seemed to work over the following decade.

4.4.2 The limits of the regime of autonomous communities

The same period in Catalonia was one of consolidation, strengthening, and even questioning of the limits of its autonomy. From 1980 to 2003, the uninterrupted rule of the CiU exploited the ambiguities of the Spanish Constitution and the power balances in Madrid to devote itself to building and strengthening Catalan self-governance with a possibilist, pragmatic, and moderate strategy.

The ambiguity and uniqueness of the Spanish Constitution stemmed from the contradictory nature of the “transition to democracy.” The constitutional text was a

product of compromises between former Francoists and a coalition of democrats, socialists, communists, and minority nationalists. Thus, while the constitution-makers were attempting to establish a democratic regime, they also needed to ensure they did not cross the red lines set by the Francoists. During its drafting, the most challenging and prolonged debates centered on the national question (Aja, 2014).

Article 2 and Title 8 of the Constitution outline the formal framework for Spain's territorial organization. Article 2 “recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of nationalities and regions” while simultaneously underscoring “the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards.” The central issue with this article is the ambiguity of the legal definitions pertaining to “nationalities” and “regions.” The Constitution does not define these terms clearly; they are not explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the text. Instead, the Constitution refers to the Autonomous Communities, serving as the institutional representations of these regions and nationalities.

Furthermore, the Constitution does not provide a clear delineation of the scope of jurisdiction or the level of authority attributed to the Autonomous Communities. This lack of clarity in the constitutional formulation serves as an intermediate solution, deliberately avoiding the explicit acknowledgment of Spain’s plurinational character, a concept that faced resistance from Francoist factions (Guibernau, 2004). Nonetheless, the Constitution recognizes the right to self-government of the “historical nationalities,” specifically the Catalan, Basque, and Galician peoples, who had already enjoyed a form of autonomy during the Second Republic (Solé Tura, 1985). This recognition facilitated a certain degree of decentralization within the state apparatus, albeit within an ambiguous legal framework.

Part 8 of the Constitution, titled “On the Territorial Organization of the State”, specifies the powers of the Autonomous Communities, delineates their relationship with the central government, and outlines the procedures for their establishment. Each Autonomous Community has its own fundamental institutional charter, known as a “statute,” which the state recognizes as an integral part of its legal framework. Unlike a federation's constitution within a federal state, where a constitution arises from constituent power, these statutes frame the administrative authorities of an Autonomous Community. Thus, autonomy under this system does not equate to territorial sovereignty but is instead a component of Spain’s multilevel governance structure (Aja, 2014).

The allocation of powers between the central state and the Autonomous Communities is outlined in Sections 148, 149, and 150 of the Constitution. Within the domain of state authorities, the Cortes Generales has the capacity to enable all or selected autonomous communities to enact legislative norms through state acts. In addition, the state can transfer or delegate powers related to its domain to the Autonomous Communities through organic laws. As previously mentioned, this character gives the state of the Autonomous Communities a dynamic character, as shifts in the political landscape can prompt new negotiations on the distribution of powers between the central state and the autonomous communities. This mechanism also results in asymmetries in how powers are exercised among different Communities (Colin, 1988).

Another enduring and significant debate revolved around the financing of the Autonomous Communities. The financial system for the autonomies is complex and incomplete, providing limited fiscal autonomy and making them dependent on the central state. Notable exceptions to this system are found in Navarre and the Basque

Country, both of which have independent tax systems. This unique arrangement, known as *concierto económico*, is established with these two Autonomous Communities based on their traditional rights (*forales*), which are acknowledged in the preamble of the Constitution (Gray, 2016).

Within this constitutional framework, a commission of the Assembly of Parliamentarians of Catalonia crafted a draft statute of autonomy for Catalonia. After extensive and challenging discussions, the Cortes Generales, with some modifications, approved the statute. Although the exclusive powers granted to the Generalitat were relatively limited, leading to divisions among Catalan nationalists (Balcells, 1996), this recognition of self-government was a significant milestone for CDC leaders following four decades of dictatorship. They anticipated further expansion of these authorities as democracy consolidated (Solé Tura, 1985). On October 25, 1979, a referendum was held, with a resounding 88% in favor of the new statute. However, a relatively high abstention rate of 40% suggested considerable dissatisfaction with the process among certain segments of the Catalan population (Butler, 1980).

When CiU took control of the Catalan government in 1980, its primary objective was to swiftly secure the transfer of authorities from the central government to the autonomous community of Catalonia. However, the first term of the CiU government was marked by the attempted military coup in 1981. Although the coup ultimately failed, it prompted a slowdown and even a reversal in the decentralization process (Aja, 2014).

In response to the failed coup, the new and more conservative UCD government and PSOE agreed on the draft Organic Law for the Harmonization of the Autonomy Process (LOAPA). This law had a centralist inclination that posed a threat

to the authorities of the autonomous communities (McRoberts, 2022)⁸.

Simultaneously, Catalonia witnessed significant mobilizations against LOAPA, led by *La Crida a la Solidaritat en Defensa de la Llengua, la Cultura i la Nació Catalanes* (Call for Solidarity in Defense of Catalan Language, Culture, and Nation), which brought together 1,300 different organizations (Guibernau, 2004). Despite its negative aspects, the law's approval marked the resumption of the decentralization process, with some of the law's centralist provisions eventually overturned by the Constitutional Court in 1983 (McRoberts, 2022).

Despite this back and forth in the center, CiU took advantage of the fact that UCD held a minority government in Madrid, which lasted until 1982. Due to the strong rapport between CiU and UCD, by 1982, Catalonia had effectively assumed control of approximately 80% of the authorities outlined in the statute. As a result, the regional government gained authority over key areas such as public education, health, and social services. Additionally, Catalonia established its own police force, and both Catalan and Castilian were officially recognized as the languages of public administration and education, marking significant steps towards greater autonomy (McRoberts, 2001).

The political landscape in Madrid underwent a significant shift after the 1982 general elections, when the PSOE secured a decisive victory, achieving an absolute majority in parliament. The PSOE's absolute majority governments remained in power until 1993. During this 11-year period, the PSOE's government did not favorably address the national aspirations of Catalonia and the Basque Country,

⁸ For instance, it mandated that the parliaments of the autonomous communities seek the approval of their laws from the central government. Concerning issues like the use and teaching of Castilian in the autonomous communities, the treatment of the Spanish flag, and the use of the terms “national” and “nation,” the law curtailed the rights of the communities from the perspective of Spanish nationalism, see Aja, 2014; McRoberts, 2022.

which sought greater autonomy. Instead, its focus was on expanding the powers of other autonomous communities, rather than devolving additional competencies to those “historic nationalities” (Verdú, 2012). In line with the Spanish center-right, the PSOE did not formally recognize Spain's multinational character or take any steps towards reforming the constitution in favor of a federalist structure, despite advocacy for such during the constitutional drafting process. Consequently, the PSOE implemented centralizing policies through fundamental laws in various areas, which heightened tensions between autonomous communities and central government (Requejo, 2010).

In the 1993 elections, the PSOE lost its parliamentary majority, leading them to rely on the parliamentary support of CiU to form a minority government. As part of their agreement, CiU negotiated a new deal with PSOE to enhance Catalonia's fiscal powers, although the outcome did not fully meet CiU's demands. However, Catalonia did gain the authority to receive 15% of the income tax, marking a significant step towards fiscal autonomy (Heywood, 1996). In the subsequent 1996 general elections, PP emerged victorious but also failed to secure an absolute majority. Similar to PSOE, PP negotiated with CiU and also engaged with Basque and Canarian nationalists, resulting in an increase in the ceded share of income tax to autonomous communities to 30% (Verge, 2013, p. 325). These agreements additionally curtailed the powers of civilian governors appointed by the central government, and the autonomous communities were officially involved in European Union affairs, with their representatives now able to participate in European Commission groups, thereby increasing their influence in EU matters (Morata, 2001).

Over these two decades, Pujol's pragmatic and moderate strategy proved effective in gradually transferring powers to the Generalitat. Catalan language, culture, and national symbols reflourished in the public sphere under the stewardship of the Autonomous Community. Additionally, many public and social services were brought under the control of the Catalan government. However, this period also revealed the limits and contradictions inherent in the state of autonomies. The powers delegated from the central government to the Generalitat did not match an equivalent increase in the region's economic resources and authorities, posing significant challenges in effectively delivering public services. Moreover, critical aspects of the economy, such as infrastructure enhancement, transportation network improvements, and airport restructuring remained under central government control (McRoberts, 2022). Thus, after examining the “loosely framed” constitutional structures and the “constitutional ambiguities” related to territorial structures as well as the formation and characteristics of autonomous or devolved governments in both cases, I will now explore the antecedents of the second significant variable, the economic issue, which influenced the party strategies both prior to and during the referendum process.

4.5 Divergent economic structures

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined the main points of the evolution of economic structures in the cases studied up to the Second World War, and mentioned the centrality of the economic issue in the independence debates in both cases. During the independence campaigns that took place during the Great Recession, stateless nationalist parties largely incorporated economic and social issues into their territorial programs. Both secessionists and unionists engaged in a fierce struggle to prove that their stance served economic prosperity and development better. Before

examining this issue in Chapter 7, to shed light on the background of the subject, this chapter will briefly touch upon the evolution and critical points of the economic structures of the cases from the mid-twentieth century to the rise of independence.

The post-World War II period was experienced quite differently in Spain and the UK. While the autarkic Spanish economy suffered severe economic stagnation under the internationally isolated Franco regime, the UK benefited from the postwar boom and began to build the welfare state. The declining Scottish economy, based on heavy industry, was revived by the international economic boom and nationalizations. This revival lasted until the mid-1960s (Finlay, 2005). Catalonia, on the other hand, was in a deplorable state due to both the state of the Spanish economy and the punitive policies of the Franco regime. This situation changed when the regime decided to end autarky and Spain began to integrate into the global economy from the early 1960s. Catalonia once again became an important economic center, thanks to the extraordinary development of the tourism sector and reindustrialization. While the prominence of the textile sector in industry decreased, metallurgy, automotive, and chemical industries came to the forefront with the investments of multinational capital. During this “economic miracle” period, Catalonia received over one million internal migrants from the rest of Spain (McRoberts, 2001).

As the Catalan economy began to rise, Scottish industry started to decline again, and this time irreversibly, from the mid-1960s onwards. The slowdown in the global economy, increasing international competition, and the lack of investment to renew aging infrastructure were factors contributing to the shrinkage of Scottish industry (Dalle Mulle, 2018). Unable to diversify its economy, Scotland became more dependent on the support of the central government and its growth rate lagged behind the UK average. This period also coincided with a time when the United

Kingdom as a whole was plunging into an economic crisis. With the loss of its former colonial empire and the gradual decline of its position in the world economy, the United Kingdom entered a stagflation crisis that would last throughout the 1970s (Finlay, 2005).

The discovery of vast oil reserves off the coast of Scotland in the late 1960s created an atmosphere of optimism during this challenging period and gave new impetus to Scottish nationalism. However, the impact of the oil, which began to be extracted from the early 1970s, on the Scottish economy remained quite limited (Harvie, 1998). On the other hand, the rise to power of the Thatcher administration in 1979 and the implementation of its neoliberal program spelled doom for the Scottish economy. Under Thatcher's government, declining heavy industry almost completely disappeared, coal mines were closed, and social benefits and subsidies were significantly reduced (Finlay, 2008). Thatcher's shock therapy led to a dramatic rise in unemployment, poverty, and emigration (Finlay, 2012). After the painful transformation process that continued throughout the 1980s, the Scottish economy began to recover in the 1990s on a service sector-based foundation. The share of the service sector, which was 24% in 1951, rose to 33% in 1971 and nearly 70% by the early 2000s. Within the service sector, public services, finance, and tourism held significant shares, while petrochemicals and electronics were other rising sectors in the restructuring (McCrone, 2001, p. 74).

The global economic slowdown in the 1970s began to affect Catalonia from the mid-decade onwards. As the economic growth rate slowed, unemployment increased. Starting from the 1980s, parallel to the general trend in Europe, the process of deindustrialization began in Catalonia. The industrial sector, which constituted 41.7% of GDP in 1980, fell to 23.3% in 2006. During the same period,

the share of the service sector rose from 42.5% to 62.3% (Alonso, 2007, pp. 39-44). However, the economic restructuring in Catalonia was not as painful as in Scotland. Spain's entry into the European Economic Community in 1986 provided new momentum to the Catalan and Spanish economies through a wave of foreign capital inflows and increased exports. On the other hand, during this period, as a significant portion of Catalan companies were acquired by multinational corporations, the Catalan bourgeoisie lost its former influence (Pérez, 2022, p. 109), and as a result of the historically weak Catalan financial structure continuing, the Catalan economy became dominated by Spanish and Basque banks (McRoberts, 2001).

After the establishment of the autonomous communities regime, there were significant contentious issues between Barcelona and Madrid in the economic field. The first of these issues was the "fiscal deficit" debate between the Generalitat and the Spanish state. Although this debate became much more acute in the following decades, it had been on the agenda since the establishment of the post-Francoist regime. At the core of this debate was the fact that the amount Catalonia received from the central budget was less than the amount of taxes collected in Catalonia⁹. At first glance, for a community whose per capita income was 15% to 20% richer than the Spanish average and which had a net trade surplus with the rest of Spain, such a deficit could be considered normal, similar to other countries. What made this fiscal deficit contentious, however, was the complex fiscal equalization mechanism between the autonomous communities, as well as Spain's asymmetric fiscal system (McRoberts, 2001, p. 95; Aja, 2014, pp. 233-48).

⁹ According to CDC representatives, there is a fiscal gap amounting to around 8% of Catalonia's GDP each year, which is approximately 15-16 billion euros. The Spanish government, however, calculates this gap to be around 4%. For differences and debates in fiscal deficit calculations, see (Ortiz, 2015; Castells, 2014).

Throughout the country, taxes collected by the central government are distributed among the autonomous communities according to the highly contentious “adjusted population” criteria, which are difficult to measure and evaluate. These criteria include debatable factors such as the geographical spread and area covered by the autonomous community, as well as hard-to-measure elements like the average age and social status within the community (Bosch & Duran, 2008). As a result of this complex system, outcomes that are open to debate in terms of tax fairness emerged. For instance, wealthier communities like Aragon and Rioja had a positive fiscal balance, while poorer communities such as Murcia and Valencia had a fiscal deficit (Ortiz, 2015, p. 85). Moreover, the Basque Country and Navarra, two of Spain's wealthiest regions, had their own tax systems based on full fiscal autonomy due to a privilege recognized in the Constitution, and they were outside the solidarity system with poorer communities (Gray, 2016).

In addition to these structural issues, another element that fueled this debate was how the resources collected from the communities were spent. Was the redistribution carried out under the principle of inter-community solidarity genuinely used to ensure economic development and reduce social inequalities in poorer communities? A paradigmatic example from the perspective of Catalan nationalism was Andalusia. Despite being one of Spain's poorest regions, with the highest level of social inequality and one of the greatest beneficiaries of the equalization mechanism, Andalusia had seen no progress over the years in resolving its economic and social issues. Instead, the resources obtained had served to further enrich the oligarchic sectors. Constitutional law scholar, former ERC militant, and Together for Catalonia (*Junts per Catalunya*, Junts) national deputy from 2021-2023, Josep Pagès, comments on this issue as follows:

“When we say that “Spain steals from us”, it is true. Through a system of fiscal abuse, Catalonia is bleeding. But it is not the Andalusian workers or the farmers of Extremadura or the people who live in small rural towns in Galicia who are benefiting this process. The extractive elites of Madrid are the real beneficiaries. So, when we say that “Spain steals from us”, we refer to the structure of the Spanish State that is at the service of certain IBEX 35¹⁰ companies and certain interests that are barricaded in the different strata and departments of the State administration. They are the ones who are benefiting from this fiscal drainage. It would be very different if the money extracted from Catalonia were distributed throughout the Spanish territory, to benefit the population as a whole. This does not happen. Spain is the victim of an administrative and business superstructure protected by the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (BOE)¹¹ that extracts wealth from the entire territory and especially from Catalonia. Because Catalonia is part of the richest areas of the entire State.” (Author Interview with Pages, 06.05.2022)

Catalonia, on the other hand, urgently needed infrastructure investments in various areas under the jurisdiction of the central government. Improving the railway networks, connecting Catalonia to the rest of Spain and France with advanced transportation networks, expanding the Prat airport in Barcelona, and having it operate autonomously from Madrid were among the Generalitat's primary demands for many years (Mas, 2008). Moreover, while Barcelona was waiting for these steps from the central government, the economy was becoming increasingly centralized in Madrid.

Under the PP government, in particular, transportation and communication investments were arranged in favor of Madrid, and Madrid-based companies received the largest share of privatizations and public tenders. At the same time, the radical reduction of inheritance and corporate taxes in the Madrid autonomous community, effectively turning the region into a tax haven, led to companies moving their headquarters to the capital and a shift of capital flow towards Madrid (Pérez, 2022, p. 112). The Catalan business community and middle classes were seriously

¹⁰ IBEX 35: The IBEX 35 (IBERian IndEX) is the benchmark stock market index of the Bolsa de Madrid, Spain's principal stock exchange. It refers to the biggest companies of Spain.

¹¹ *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (Official State Gazette) is the official gazette of the Spanish State. Here, the interviewee refers to companies that are privileged or favored by the central government.

concerned about this trend, which they viewed as part of the PP government's recentralization policy (Cercle, 2001; Pérez, 2022, pp 94-102). Pasquall Maragall, the PSC leader and future president of the Generalitat in 2003, ironically expressed this dissatisfaction in his article titled "Madrid takes off" published in *El País* in 2001:

“Before, Madrid was the political capital, and Barcelona and Bilbao, and later Valencia, were the industrial and economic capitals. Now it seems the opposite. Now Madrid is above all the economic capital, the capital of innovation and the new economy, while political power has decentralized: Catalonia has its Generalitat, Euskadi its fueros and agreements, and the Valencia Community has its Zaplana, with its IVAM and its fast trains and highways to Madrid (what more do they want?).”

These contentious issues first reflected in the discussions during the status reform, and then in the agenda of Catalan nationalism during the rise of independence. In Scotland, where per capita income was at or slightly below the average of the UK, unlike in Catalonia, the fiscal balance debate was not a primary issue. The main reason for this was that the UK's interterritorial fiscal transfer system had a mechanism that advantaged Scotland and other devolved regions. The block grants provided to devolved governments from the UK central budget were calculated using the Barnett formula. In 1978, ahead of Scotland's 1979 devolution referendum, the Labour Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Lord Barnett, designed a proposal for public spending. The proposal foresaw allocations taking into account the population ratios of devolved regions and past public spending levels. Historically, Scotland received a larger share of per capita public expenditures due to relatively high poverty levels and the additional costs caused by challenging geographical conditions. Therefore, although the formula adjusts spending in devolved regions based on changes in spending in England, the Barnett Formula increments are proportional to the existing ratios, which already had a higher per capita expenditure. As a result, Scotland has

continued to maintain or increase this higher level of spending relative to England (Leyland, 2021).

Before and after the referendum, various unionist factions, ranging from populist right parties like UKIP to liberals, demanded that this arrangement, which advantaged Scotland and other devolved regions, be changed (Wilkinson, 2015). Even Barnett, the namesake of the formula, stated just before the 2014 independence referendum that he had thought this arrangement would be temporary and that it was a major mistake that it was still in effect: “It is unfair and should be stopped, it is a mistake. This way is terrible and can never be sustainable, it is a national embarrassment and personally embarrassing to me as well” (Swinford, 2014).

However, the relative advantages of the Barnett formula did not prevent the SNP from fighting for fiscal autonomy. Fiscal autonomy was primarily an indispensable part of the SNP's long-term independence goal. But beyond the ideological and strategic objective, the SNP had more concrete reasons for fiscal autonomy as well. Especially with the bitter taste left by the Thatcher era, the SNP argued that Westminster was sidelining Scotland and prioritizing the interests of London and the southeast of England. The neoliberal paradigm dominant in Westminster parties was leading to a gradual deterioration of public services. Moreover, Scotland's oil was enriching British multinational companies and financial capital rather than addressing Scotland's needs (Foley & Ramand, 2014). In order to use Scotland's resources to improve Scottish public services, the SNP continued to advocate for fiscal sovereignty during and after the discussions of the 1998 Scotland Act. As I will address in Chapter 7, reforms related to Scotland's fiscal autonomy took place with the regulations made in 2012, with the start of the referendum process, and in 2016, following the referendum.

On the other hand, within the national communities examined, neither the economic grievances were homogeneous nor did the predominant economic issues affect all social segments in the same way. As two early industrialized entities, both Catalonia and Scotland always had strong class distinctions, which significantly influenced the political shaping of stateless nationalism. In addition to class distinctions and conflicts, ideological differences within nationalism also played an important role in this shaping. When secessionism became the dominant tendency within nationalisms, the inheritance of this divergent past was instrumental in shaping and implementing the secessionist strategy.

4.6 Internal configuration of stateless nationalism

In Catalonia and Scotland, nationalism began to take shape with the emergence of modern capitalism, led by local elites and the bourgeoisie. It developed with demands for the recognition of distinct cultural identity and self-governance by the central authority. For the Catalan bourgeoisie, whose political differences with the central political and economic elite were more pronounced, Catalan nationalism also emerged as a federal, protectionist, and progressive option for Spain (Smith, 2014). The first nationalist associations were also established by the local bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, as capitalism developed, social segments with different class interests within stateless national communities became more distinct, and nationalism acquired a more pluralistic, heterogeneous, and complex character. In Spain, marked by political upheavals, the working class and popular segments began to play a significant role in changing political regimes through social mobilizations from the second half of the 19th century onwards (Vilar, 1983).

Nevertheless, during the social mobilizations, the popular masses not only acted against the Old Regime in Madrid but also expressed their own economic and social demands. This duality posed a difficult dilemma for the emerging Catalan bourgeoisie. On the one hand, it needed the popular masses as allies in the struggle against the Old Regime. On the other hand, it relied on the oppressive apparatus of the Old Regime to respond to the threat posed by the popular segments to private property relations (Balcells, 1977, p. 35).

These contradictions became apparent with the 1868 revolution against the corrupt, archaic, and malfunctioning Isabel monarchy. After the revolution overthrew the monarchy, Catalan elites, who had previously been excluded from Madrid politics, took on a leadership role in this revolutionary process. However, while the federalist and republican Catalan elites received significant support from the urban Catalan middle classes and the emerging working class, the high Catalan bourgeoisie, particularly concerned about the threat of social revolution after the 1871 Paris Commune experience, sided with the representatives of the Old Regime (Balcells, 1996). With the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1874 and the end of the revolutionary process, the dreams of the Catalan elites to lead Spain were permanently dashed (Smith, 2014; Balcells, 1977).

In the last quarter of the 19th century, while the working class in Catalonia organized under the influence of anarchism, conservative Catalan industrialists founded their own political party, *Lliga Regionalista*. Winning the support of the Catalan middle classes as well, the right-wing and regionalist Lliga became the hegemonic party of Catalonia until the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Despite anarchists being the dominant force within the working class, their disregard for the Catalan national issue in the name of proletarian internationalism and their

opposition to forming political parties and participating in elections created a political vacuum. This vacuum was filled by the populist and anti-Catalanist Republican Party (Ucelay-Da Cal, 2018).

As a reflection of the development of modern nationalism in Scotland, the first national association was founded by Scottish political elites in 1853. The National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights demanded better representation for Scotland within the United Kingdom and the improvement of its political and economic position. Among its prominent demands were increased public spending for Scotland, an increase in the number of seats allocated to Scotland in Westminster, and the reestablishment of the Scottish Office (Devine, 2012).

Modern Scottish nationalism also had a popular dimension from the beginning. The English and anglicized Scottish landowners in the Highlands, due to the extraordinary development of the textile sector with the industrial revolution, abandoned traditional agriculture and switched to sheep farming. Sheep farming, which required much less manpower, led to the eviction of Highland peasants from their lands by landowners, causing some to emigrate abroad and others to settle in large cities where industry was developing. Consequently, the Highland Clearances resulted in the spread of Gaelic culture to the big cities and within the working class, combining economic grievances with national identity (Davidson, 2000).

Unlike Catalonia, the less conflictual relationships of Scottish political and economic elites with the center facilitated their easier incorporation by the political establishment in Westminster. From the last quarter of the 19th century, Scottish political elites were within the ranks of the Liberal Party, which viewed Scottish home rule sympathetically. Following the significant increase in the number of voters due to the 1884 Reform Act, the Liberals became the hegemonic party in Scotland

until the end of World War I (Devine, 2012, p. 313). Inspired by the Irish home rule arrangements, the Young Scots Society was founded in 1900 as the youth movement of the Liberals. However, during this period, the home rule issue caused divisions within the party, and the Liberals failed to fulfill their home rule promise.

From the second half of the 19th century, the working class began to organize en masse in trade unions and, in the last quarter of the same century, started to fight for political representation. After the failure of attempts to run worker candidates within the Liberal Party, independent labor parties began to be established. The short-lived Scottish Labour Party was founded as early as 1888. One of the party's two main founders was Cunninghame Graham, who would become the first president of the NPS, and the other was Keir Hardie, who would become the first leader of the Independent Labour Party, founded in 1893, and the Labour Party, founded in 1900.

Before World War I, a radical labor movement known as "Red Clydeside" emerged in Scotland's industrial region along the Clyde River. This movement, which organized mass and powerful strikes demanding better working and living conditions, also took an anti-war stance despite the prevailing British patriotic sentiment in Scotland, and its leaders were arrested several times during the war. One of the prominent leaders of the movement, John MacLean, who was elected as Scotland's Bolshevik Consul in 1918, advocated for Scotland's independence from a socialist and internationalist perspective, which differed from the dominant trends in the British radical left (Young, 1983). MacLean led the founding of the Scottish Workers' Republican Party in 1923.

Although Red Clydeside did not succeed in establishing a socialist Scottish Republic, it was one of the significant factors in ending the hegemony of the Liberal Party. From 1922 onwards, the Labour Party's domination began in Scotland. During

this period, the Unionist Party, which had close ties with the Conservative Party but maintained its independence, also consolidated. While embracing Scottish identity, the Unionist Party opposed devolution and received significant support from the middle classes. It remained Labour's main rival for decades until it merged with the Conservatives in 1965 (Devine, 2012).

With the Labour becoming the dominant party in Scotland, home rule supporters began to exert pressure on the Labour Party for devolution. During this period, the Scottish Home Rule Association (SHRA), which received strong support from Scottish trade unions and Labour members, actively campaigned for this cause. Furthermore, Labour's brief periods in power in the 1920s heightened expectations for home rule. However, the failure of the bills for home rule presented in Westminster in 1924 and 1927 to gain sufficient support from Labour and thus being rejected strengthened the idea of establishing an independent nationalist party (Finlay, 1994). The first secessionist organization in Scotland, the Scots National League, founded in 1920, began to gain strength after the rejection of the first home rule bill in 1924. The rejection of the second home rule bill in 1927 led to a crisis within the SHRA and its merger with the SNL, along with other nationalist organizations, resulting in the formation of the first secessionist party, the NPS (Petrie, 2016).

In Catalonia, the first stable secessionist organization, *Estat Català* (the Catalan State), was founded in 1922, around the same time as in Scotland, just before Primo de Rivera's military coup. During the dictatorship, in 1926, *Estat Català* attempted to organize a guerrilla struggle by entering Northern Catalonia from the Pyrenees. However, its leader, Francesc Macia, and his companions were caught and arrested by the French police at the French border. Although this attempt ended in

fiasco, it brought the Catalan issue to the international stage and turned the organization's leader, Macia, into a hero in Catalonia (Ucelay-da Cal, 1984).

After the fall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, this organization merged with other left-wing and republican Catalanist parties, leading to the formation of ERC. Due to the different tendencies within it, ERC did not explicitly advocate for Catalonia's independence. Instead, it supported the recognition of Catalonia's national identity and the formation of a Catalan state within a federative republic to be established together with the other peoples of Iberia (Ucelay-da Cal, 1984).

In the moment of revolutionary crisis in 1931, ERC leader Macia declared the establishment of the Catalan Republic from the balcony of the Generalitat. However, soon after, ERC sat down with the republican parties of Madrid and reached an agreement with the recognition of Catalonia's autonomy. ERC received significant support not only from the urban middle classes but also from the poor and landless peasants. Thanks to its tacit cooperation with CNT, the votes of the Catalan working class also flowed to ERC. In the political arena, the hegemony of ERC, along with CNT's dominance in the trade union field, left no room for PSOE in Catalonia, contrary to the general trend in Spain. Both PSOE and Communist Party of Spain PCE (*Partido Comunista de España*, PCE) remained marginal in Catalonia during this period. The exception was Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (*Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista*, POUM), which was founded by anti-Stalinist factions expelled from PCE from the late 1920s onwards (Broué & Temime, 1961). As a communist party that clearly advocated for Catalonia's right to self-determination, POUM held an important position in Catalan politics before and during the Civil War. However, during the Civil War, the balance shifted in favor of PSUC, formed by the merger of socialists and Stalinist communists. The primary reason for PSUC's

rise was the military aid received from Stalin's regime to the Republican camp.

Under Franco's regime, PSUC began to build its underground organization from the late 1950s and became the largest force in the Catalan labor movement from the 1960s to the mid-1980s (Fontana, 2014).

During the eight-year period of the Second Republic, nationalist parties were dominant in Catalonia, while British parties remained the hegemonic parties in Scotland until the 1970s. Furthermore, in Catalonia, nationalism gained a pluralistic character, being organized into different parties from a very early period, whereas Scottish nationalism primarily developed within the SNP, with different tendencies forming within the SNP itself. On the other hand, the concept of self-governance advocated by the SNP -formed by the merger of the left-of-center and secessionist NPS and the moderate, home rule-supporting SP- had always ambiguous, pluralistic, and dynamic character.

Although the NPS included both fundamentalist and moderate wings, the party's charter contained the phrases “national sovereignty” and “independence within the British group of nations.” The latter phrase meant that the NPS was demanding a status similar to that of British dominions. This status would mean autonomy for Scotland not only in domestic affairs but also in foreign affairs and defense. In contrast, the SP clearly embraced the British Empire and the monarchy, viewed the Scots as one of the mother nations that built the Empire, and advocated for a home rule program limited to Scotland's domestic affairs (Finlay, 1994).

Furthermore, the NPS linked the territorial issue with social and economic problems, proposing a left-wing program on topics such as housing, poverty, and unemployment, and arguing that economic and social issues would be better managed under Scotland's self-governance. On the other hand, the SP, consisting of

anti-socialist, center-right political figures, opposed the linking of the national issue with social and economic problems (Brown Swan & McEwen, 2021).

Despite these differences, the majority tendency within the NPS, led by John MacCormick, took a pro-merger stance with the SP. They first purged the fundamentalists within the NPS and then moderated their political programs to a level acceptable to the SP, leading to the establishment of the SNP. The SNP program, which did not include the concepts of “national sovereignty” and “independence,” called for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament with final authority over Scottish affairs, including taxation; sharing rights and responsibilities with England as "mother nations" within the British Empire; and representation in the Empire's competent bodies in defense and foreign policy. In response to these political concessions made by the NPS, the SP, whose majority were also members of the Liberal and Conservative Parties, only accepted the criterion of sole membership in the SNP (Petrie, 2016).

The SNP began its political life in a period marked by the severe impact of the Great Depression on the Scottish economy, with unemployment and poverty dominating the public agenda. Comprising both left and right wings with opposing views on economic and social problems, as well as radical and moderate factions on territorial issues, the SNP failed to adopt a coherent, ambitious, and convincing stance during this period. Focusing primarily on a vague demand for home rule, the SNP performed poorly in the 1935 election, falling short of the NPS's previous vote (Lynch, 2002).

The political disagreements that existed at the time of the SNP's founding continued in various forms over the years and became one of the significant barriers to the SNP's emergence from marginality (Newell, 1998). Disagreements over

economic and territorial issues in its formative years were followed by divisions over conscription during World War II. During the war, one of the SNP's leading figures, John MacCormick, left the party to form the Scottish Convention, which functioned like a pressure group for self-governance. Despite the wartime conditions and splits however, the SNP survived and reorganized itself.

After the moderate wing left the party, the SNP updated its Constitution in 1943. Unlike the 1934 version, which leaned towards home rule, the updated version emphasized "national sovereignty," thereby confirming the goal of independence, even if the term itself was not explicitly mentioned:

Self-Government for Scotland. The restoration of Scottish national sovereignty, by the establishment of a democratic Scottish government, whose authority will be limited only by such agreements as will be freely entered into with other nations in order to further international co-operation and world peace (quoted in Lynch, 2002: 58).

As previously mentioned, the two decades following the war, dominated by two British parties, did not provide politically favorable conditions for the SNP. It was a formative yet arduous period before the party's rise from the mid-1960s onwards. Unlike the chaotic and conflictual first decade, during this period, the party began to consolidate politically and organizationally under its new leadership. Apart from pressure groups campaigning for home rule, no rival party to the SNP emerged within Scottish nationalism. In addition to clarifying its pro-independence goal, the party developed policies in various areas. It participated in both general and local elections, established new branches in many constituencies, and gradually increased its membership and financial resources.

After the SNP's victory in the 1967 by-election in Hamilton, a Labour stronghold, the Labour government established the Royal Commission on the Constitution to discuss devolution. The Conservatives, at their 1968 conference,

announced their support for the establishment of a Scottish parliament. The rise of the SNP, despite the sincerity and seriousness of the mainstream parties being quite debatable, forced these parties to accept the demand for home rule and broadened the legitimacy of the SNP. In the 1970 election, the SNP participated in 65 out of 71 constituencies for the first time and surpassed the Liberals, becoming Scotland's third party for the first time (Lynch, 2002).

On the other hand, the transformation of the SNP into a mass and powerful party presented new strategic challenges. Until the early 1970s, the party had remained a non-ideological national movement without adopting a stance on the left-right spectrum. However, both the deepening economic crisis and the competition with Labour, which had become the primary party in Scotland, brought the SNP to a crossroads. Billy Wolfe, who became the party's chairman in 1969, and the majority of the new national executive argued that the party should move to the left and develop policies in social and economic areas. This would allow the SNP to surpass Labour in working-class constituencies. Another faction of the party, however, believed that maintaining the traditional non-ideological stance was necessary, arguing that adopting a social democratic identity would make it impossible to attract votes from liberal and conservative-leaning voters (Harvie, 2016).

Despite the differences of opinion within the leadership, the party adopted a social democratic stance at the 1973 conference, and this position was reflected in the party's 1974 election manifestos and campaigns. In these elections, where the party achieved historic success, the SNP managed to gain high votes in Labour strongholds but could not surpass Labour votes, resulting in no MPs being elected from these areas due to the first-past-the-post system. Instead, the SNP succeeded in becoming the first party in areas traditionally dominated by the Conservatives.

Between October 1974 and 1979, with 11 MPs, the SNP was able to form a parliamentary group for the first time, facing a difficult test. On one hand, the tension between the social democratic national executive and the anti-Labour-leaning parliamentary group needed to be carefully managed. On the other hand, the inexperienced SNP parliamentary group was under attack from both sides. The Conservatives labeled the SNP as "left-wing separatists," while Labour called them "Tartan Tories" (Mithcell et al., 2011). Moreover, while Labour narrowly won the October 1974 elections with a promise of devolution, there were MPs within the party who opposed devolution. In conditions where both the Conservatives and a faction within Labour opposed devolution, the votes and parliamentary performance of SNP MPs became much more critical. The party also had to manage the tension between maintaining its strategic goal of independence and supporting the proposal for devolution as a "stepping stone" (Brown Swan & McEwen, 2021).

After years of exhausting parliamentary debate, the 1978 Scotland Act, passed with SNP votes, left the party leadership in a difficult position. Firstly, all of the SNP's proposals to expand home rule were rejected in parliament, resulting in a very limited self-governance proposal. Moreover, an amendment proposed by a Labour MP, requiring 40% of all eligible voters to approve the referendum, further increased distrust in Labour's commitment to devolution and put the success of the referendum at great risk. Finally, the party leadership had to convince the fundamentalist wing, a significant minority within the party and supporting the "Independence nothing less" stance, to join the Yes campaign.

The failure of the home rule proposal due to the 40% threshold led to great disappointment and chaos for the SNP. Meanwhile, after the Scotland Act was passed, the votes that had shifted from Labour to the SNP began to return to Labour,

causing a decline in SNP's support¹². Additionally, a portion of the traditional conservative electorate, disillusioned with the SNP after the referendum results, wanted to see the Conservatives in power (Devine, 2012).

Indeed, the May 1979 elections following the referendum meant a new nightmare for the SNP. In the elections, the SNP lost 13% of the vote and 9 MPs, while the anti-home rule Conservative Thatcher administration came to power. With the devolution issue disappearing from the national agenda for a long time, the SNP plunged into a severe crisis. Throughout the 1980s, the number of members and local branches steadily declined. The financial income significantly decreased, and the early 1980s were marked by internal divisions and debates (Lynch, 2002).

While 1979 marked the end of an era in Scotland, it represented the beginning of a new rise in Catalonia, where a referendum for autonomous status was held. After the approval of the referendum, the moderate and pragmatic nationalism of CiU dominated Catalanism for more than two decades, and a party system based on the hegemony of *Convergència* and the socialists, known as “*sociovergència*,” developed in Catalonia. During this period, CiU won the regional elections, while PSC was the winner of the general elections. In the local elections, PSC dominated Barcelona, the heart of Catalonia, whereas CiU had supremacy in provincial areas. (Dowling, 2013)

¹² The Labour government's enactment of the Scotland Act to implement devolution in 1978 boosted its prestige in Scotland and led some voters who had shifted to the SNP to return to Labour.

Table 5. Local Election Results in Catalonia (1979-1999)

Year	PSC	CiU	ERC	PSUC /ICV	AP/PP	UCD /CDS	Turn out
1979	26.6 (950) ¹³	18.6 (1765)	3.8	20.2	1.3	13.3	60.9
1983	39.4 (1739)	24.9 (3328)	2.8	11.2	9.2	--	67.9
1987	37.1 (1707)	32.5 (4365)	2.4	10.3	5.7	3.1	68.5
1991	36.9 (1840)	33.2 (4370)	3.3 (230)	9.6 (276)	6.7 (253)		57.8
1995	32.8 (1705)	29.9 (4267)	6.2 (525)	11.8 (368)	12.2 (453)		64.7
1999	37.1 (2033)	26.3 (4118)	7.6 (644)	7.8 (209)	10.8 (452)		55.6

Source: Balcells, 1996: 200 (between 1979-1987); El Departament d'Estadística i Difusió de Dades (between 1991-1999)

Following its surprising victory in the 1980 Catalan parliamentary elections, CiU initially proposed a coalition government to PSC. However, PSC declined the offer, leading CiU to form a minority government reliant on the parliamentary support of ERC and UCD (Balcells, 1996). Taking advantage of the disorientation of rival parties, CiU successfully expanded its influence during this period and continued to govern the Generalitat with an absolute parliamentary majority in the subsequent three regional elections. It positioned itself as the broad church of Catalanism, capable of drawing votes from both the right and the left (Barberà & Barrio, 2006).

CiU, whose majority of votes came from Catalan-origin, middle-class voters living in rural or medium-sized areas, faced PSC, whose voter base was made up of the electorate that came to Catalonia with the wave of internal migration in the 1960s and formed the majority of the working class. PSC was founded in 1978 through the merger of the Catalan federation of PSOE with social democratic and Catalan

¹³ The numbers in parentheses represent the total number of municipal councilors won by the political parties

nationalist parties. Although PSC was the reference for PSOE in Catalonia and sat in the same parliamentary group in Madrid, it had organizational autonomy from PSOE. PSC consisted of different tendencies regarding Catalan nationalism, which caused crises within the party in its early years (Balcells, 1996).

In 1978, PSC removed Catalonia's right to self-determination from its program, and from 1983 onwards, it refrained from embracing the identity of Catalan nationalism and began to employ the term pejoratively in reference to CiU. This shift in orientation led to the departure of more nationalist factions from the party¹⁴.

Furthermore, the centralizing policies of PSOE had a detrimental impact on the image of PSC. Some segments of PSC's electorate, while continuing to vote for PSC in the general and local elections, opted for CiU in the subsequent Catalan parliamentary elections, viewing it as the advocate and architect of Catalan self-government (Verdú, 2012).

On the other hand, due to both Catalonia's historically pluralistic and fragmented political structure and the proportional representation electoral system, there were significant political actors besides CiU and PSC in both conventional and non-conventional arenas. The foremost among these actors was PSUC. In addition to being the largest organized force within the labor movement in Catalonia, PSUC achieved great electoral success by obtaining around 18% of the vote between 1977 and 1980. However, the early 1980s brought about a profound internal crisis within the party, stemming from the division between the Eurocommunists and the pro-Soviet faction. The PSUC experienced a dramatic decline in its electoral support in the 1984 elections, receiving just 5.6% of the vote (Pallarés & Font, 1995). In the

¹⁴ For example, In the *Cortes Generales*, the only party to oppose the centralist LOAPA was CiU. PSC voted in favor of the law, a stance that triggered internal conflicts within the party and substantial disappointment in Catalonia (Castro 2011).

latter half of the 1980s, the party initiated a restructuring process, aligning itself more closely with Catalan left-wing nationalism and subsequently establishing the federation known as Initiative for Catalonia (*Iniciativa per Catalunya*, IC). In 1995, the IC formed a coalition with the Greens, called Initiative for Catalonia Greens (*Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*, ICV), which injected new vitality into the Catalan radical left. ICV continued to play an influential role in Catalan politics throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

During the 1980s, Spain's conservative right, initially represented by *Alianza Popular* (People's Alliance - AP) and later by PP since 1989, did not have a strong foothold in Catalonia. In the first four autonomous elections held between 1980 and 1992, the party averaged a modest electoral score of 5.3% of the vote in Catalonia. However, in the 1990s, the PP's general rise in Spanish politics was mirrored in Catalonia. The party succeeded in gaining the support of voters born outside Catalonia who may have been uncomfortable with Catalan nationalism. This expansion of its voter base allowed the PP to strengthen its position in Catalonia. In the 2000s, the PP was able to maintain its electoral support in Catalonia above 10%, signifying its growing presence and influence in the region's political landscape (McRoberts, 2022).

The dominant party of the Second Republic, ERC, experienced a period of political and organizational crisis during the 1980s. The party struggled to differentiate itself from CiU in terms of both strategy and political program, resulting in poor electoral outcomes. However, by the end of the decade, a new direction emerged within the party that firmly advocated for the independence of Catalonia, in contrast to CiU's possibilist approach. This strategic shift breathed new life into ERC, enabling it to recover from its electoral setbacks (Marcet & Argelaguet, 1998).

In the 1990s, the party consolidated itself as the third-largest political force in Catalonia. In the 2003 autonomous elections, it achieved its best electoral results in the post-Francoist era, securing 16.5% of the popular vote (Argelaguet, 2004).

Additionally, although remaining a marginal force outside of parliament, secessionism continued to exist as a political movement during this period. Known as Independentist Left (*Esquerra Independentista*, EI), this movement was inspired by national liberation movements and was founded in 1968 under the name Socialist Party of Catalan Countries' National Liberation (*Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional*, PSAN). PSAN was a socialist party advocating for the unification and independence of *Països Catalans*¹⁵. Although PSAN disbanded due to internal divisions without achieving mass influence, it trained cadres who would lead pro-independence groups and movements in the 1980s (Vilaregut, 2011). With ERC's turn towards independence, some EI components joined ERC. The secessionist anti-capitalist organizations that maintained their independence eventually formed CUP, which began to rise in Catalan politics from the 2000s onwards (Barberà, 2017).

Meanwhile, CiU, the dominant party of this period, maintained an absolute majority in the Catalan parliament from 1984 to 1995. As mentioned earlier, this period of institutionalization and the consolidation of Catalan self-government also exposed the limits of the state of autonomies. Constitutional ambiguity led to numerous disputes between central and regional governments over jurisdiction. Central governments challenged dozens of laws approved by regional parliaments, and regional governments, in turn, contested numerous laws approved by the national

¹⁵ The term *Països Catalans* (Catalan Countries) refers to the Catalan-speaking territories of the historical Crown of Aragon, which are Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, the French departments of the Pyrénées-Orientales (Northern Catalonia), and Andorra (Buffery and Marcer, 2011: 102).

parliament before the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court became a prominent player on the political scene (Guibernau, 2004).

In the 1990s, there were other factors that called into question CiU's autonomist strategy. In the late 1980s, the independence of the Baltic states and the unification of Germany within the framework of the right to self-determination found its reflection in Catalonia. The view that the principle of self-determination was not contrary to Spain's existing constitution began to gain ground within nationalist circles (Barberà & Barrio, 2006). Meanwhile, ERC consolidated its position within Catalan nationalism as a social democratic, progressive, and pro-independence party, setting itself apart from CiU, which was economically liberal, socially conservative, and politically autonomist (Argelaguet, 2004). Within CDC, the younger and newer generation also exhibited a greater inclination toward sovereigntist or independentist ideas (Martín i Berbois, 2011).¹⁶

According to Jordi Argelaguet, president of the *Center d'Estudis d'Opinió* (The Center for Opinion Studies - CEO) from 2011 to 2021 and an academic expert on Catalan party politics, this political mood is called “diffuse independentism,” a sentiment also reflected in the surveys:

Already in the year 1996, in a survey conducted by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS - Center of Sociological Research), in 1996 there was already a simple question: "Do you agree with the independence of Catalonia?" Percentages above 35-36% were recorded. Therefore, there are many people who would agree, in an ideal world, with independence. But when this translated into a strictly political strategy, the more feasible approach was, "Well, let's negotiate, there's room to understand each other," etc. This, as I tell you, was the situation until the year 2000, so to speak. (Author Interview Jordi Argelaguet, 20.10.2016)¹⁷

¹⁶ Joaquim Colominas, who in his youth was a militant in CDC's youth organization, *Juventut Nacionalista de Catalunya* (JNC), recalls that one of the most popular slogans of JNC was “*Avui Convergència, matí Independència*” (Today Convergence, tomorrow Independence). (Author Interview with Joaquim Colominas, 22.06.2022)

¹⁷ This interview was conducted during my master's thesis research while I was a student at UAB on an Erasmus fellowship.

This changing political mood also became apparent at CDC's 10th Congress in 1996, marking the beginning of a strategic shift shortly after the 1995 elections when CiU lost its absolute majority in the Catalan parliament. For the first time, the party incorporated the principle of self-determination into its congress documents and adopted a more sovereigntist orientation. Leaders of the pragmatic and moderate faction of the party, like Miquel Roca, were no longer in leadership positions. Pere Esteve assumed the role of the party's general secretary, and Felip Puig became the secretary of organization, both of whom were known for their more radical perspectives (Sallés, 2016).

One of the initial manifestations of this strategic renewal was the Barcelona Declaration, signed in July 1998 at the initiative of Pere Esteve. CiU, along with PNV and BNG jointly issued this declaration. It occurred at a time when the Spanish nationalist and centralist discourses of the PP were gaining prominence. In the declaration, the three parties called for the explicit recognition of the plurinational character of the Spanish state (Declaración de Barcelona, 1998).

Concurrently, in the 1999 Catalan parliamentary elections, PSC, rejuvenated under the leadership of Pasqual Maragall, posed a significant challenge to CiU. Maragall, a charismatic leader who had served as the mayor of Barcelona from 1982 to 1997, represented the more Catalanist and federalist faction within PSC. Maragall entered the 1999 elections with a promise to reform Catalonia's status. PSC made a substantial impact in the elections, narrowly surpassing CiU and becoming the party with the most votes. However, Catalonia's electoral system, which gives more representation to small enclaves than metropolitan areas, resulted in PSC, with 52 deputies, trailing behind CiU's 56 in terms of the number of deputies. With the support of PP, Jordi Pujol was once more re-elected as the president of the

Generalitat (Castro, 2011). Thus, the 1999 elections served as a significant warning for CiU despite the party's ability to maintain regional governance. It became clear that the party was experiencing an electoral decline.

While the 1980s saw the consolidation of self-governance in Catalonia, nationalists in Scotland were in a state of defeatism. Following the referendum and election defeats in 1979, the SNP was demoralized and strategically adrift. Wolfe, who had tried to keep the party on a social democratic and moderate course throughout the 1970s, resigned in the same year, and Gordon Wilson, who embraced the party's traditional non-ideological position, took over the leadership. Wilson also belonged to the fundamentalist camp that opposed devolution and the gradualist strategy (Lynch, 2016).

In the early 1980s in Scotland, while the Conservatives moved further to the right under Thatcher's neoliberal and centralist policies, the Labour Party began to adopt a more leftist stance under its new leadership. The moderate wing within Labour split from the party to form the Social Democratic Party and began an electoral alliance with the Liberals. Within this changing party system, "The 79 Group" was founded as a faction aiming to steer the SNP further to the left and into a more radical stance, positioning it as the true opposition to Thatcher's government and aiming to compete with Labour in this left-wing political space. The 79 Group advocated for the SNP to go beyond being just an electoral party and to organize direct action and civil disobedience campaigns against Thatcher's administration. Although this faction remained a minority within the party, it included a significant portion of the party's elites. Even though the faction disbanded in 1982 without achieving its fundamental goals, it contributed to the SNP acquiring a clear center-

left, social democratic identity throughout the 1980s (Brown Swan & McEwen, 2021).

After the continued electoral decline in the 1983 general elections, the SNP held a significant conference to address its strategic direction. This conference was one of the crucial steps in overcoming the party's crisis and in its reorganization in the subsequent years. John Swinney

recalls this conference as follows:

I think, the period from 1979 to 1983, was a pretty difficult period, pretty purposeless. And with a lot of internal conflict, as the party wrestled with these arguments. I think then I would highlight the 1983 Party Conference, which came after another very poor general election result, as the moment where I sensed the mood of the party changed. And the party became more focused on how do we resolve some of these questions. And that began to manifest itself in a debate about some key policy questions at the 1983 the party conference, there were three big strategic debates. Should the SNP call for essentially, a devolved proposition? To as a stepping stone to independence? Should the SNP become a pro EU party? And should the SNP become a pro NATO party? And I remember those debates been three absolutely fantastic, well conducted good debates about the substance of these issues. And if I remember correctly, the only one that went through was the EU motion. (Author Interview with Swinney, 05.03.2024)

At this conference, the SNP changed its stance on the European Community. In the 1974 referendum on the UK's entry into the Community, the party had called for a No vote. However, it now adopted a position advocating for Scotland's political representation within the Community and embraced the slogan "Independence in Europe." While the motion regarding a gradualist strategy towards independence was rejected at this conference, it received the support of the party majority at the conference held the following year. Thus, the SNP began to support campaigns and platforms formed with the demand for home rule. The stance against NATO membership was also reaffirmed during this process (Lynch, 2016).

Although the Conservatives suffered a decisive defeat in Scotland in the 1987 general elections, their continued rule through votes from the rest of the UK gave

new momentum to Scottish nationalism and the demand for home rule. In the mobilizations against Thatcher's highly controversial "poll tax" implementation, Labour adopted a hesitant and passive stance, while the SNP actively participated and led civil disobedience campaigns. Following the successful poll tax campaign, combined with Sillars' election victory in Govan, the SNP entered a period of significant rise. This rise gained new momentum in 1990 when Alex Salmond became the party leader. Salmond played a crucial role in making the SNP a mainstream political party again, not only through his media-friendly and popular personality but also by forming a professional and qualified party team and modernizing the party apparatus (Ritchie, 2016). All in all, while both the SNP and CDC managed to maintain their hegemonic positions within stateless nationalism throughout this period, they were entering a new millennium marked by uncertainty, where they would face significant challenges on both the territorial and socio-economic dimensions.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter began by providing a detailed "descriptive context" for the cases under study. Initially, it summarized the emergence of the center-periphery cleavages in Catalonia and Scotland, highlighting their fundamental characteristics. In this context, it explored how both countries, initially independent entities, became integrated into larger neighboring states, as well as the dynamics of capitalist development, the emergence and key features of Catalan and Scottish nationalism, and the foundation of first nationalist organizations. Subsequently, the focus shifted to the evolution of the SNP from the end of World War II to the late 1970s. This included analyzing the SNP's evolution from a marginal organization to a mass party

in the 1970s, internal debates over territorial and socio-economic strategies, the failure of Labour-led devolution efforts, and the subsequent crisis within the SNP. It also examined the origins of the CDC during the same period, its development into a political party, its organizational construction, strategic orientations, and its victory in the first Catalan parliamentary elections.

Following this first part on the descriptive context, the chapter proceeded to a comparative analysis of three factors identified as “critical antecedents.” The first of these variables is the “constitutional ambiguity” regarding territorial organization, resulting from the “loosely framed” constitutional polities of both Spain and the United Kingdom, albeit under very different forms. As a result of this ambiguity, it is analyzed how, in both cases, shifts in the balance of power between political parties in the national parliaments gave dynamism to the center-periphery cleavage and how, under this dynamism, the evolution of self-governance in Catalonia in its first two decades and devolution in Scotland took place.

The second critical antecedent concerns fiscal autonomy. In order to better understand the different forms of economic grievances embodied in the two cases, it briefly touched upon the transformations of economic structures after the Second World War. It then compared the fiscal authority granted to the self-governments in Catalonia and Scotland. In Catalonia, the main grievance revolves around Spain’s asymmetric and complex inter-territorial transfer system, which is perceived as economically discriminatory against Catalonia. In Scotland, the main issue is the divergence between the economic policies of Westminster (characterized by neoliberalism) and the preferences of the majority of Scottish voters (leaning towards social democracy). As a result, the issue of fiscal autonomy became popularly framed as a “fiscal deficit” in Catalonia and a “democratic deficit” in Scotland.

The third critical antecedent pertains to the formation and evolution of stateless nationalisms and party systems in both cases. This final section provided a brief overview of the emergence and development of nationalist and secessionist organizations in Catalonia and Scotland, before delving into the diversity within stateless nationalism and examining how nationalism was politically represented up to the turn of the millennium, as well as the evolution of party systems in each context.

In Scotland, a key characteristic has been the coexistence of different tendencies of nationalism under the umbrella of the SNP. The SNP has always contained an internal tension between “fundamentalists” and “gradualists,” positioning itself as a vaguely defined self-governance party. While the party also encompassed a range of positions on the left-right spectrum, since the early 1970s it has increasingly identified itself as a center-left, social democratic party. Following the decline of the Conservatives in Scotland since the early 1960s, the SNP's primary rival has been the Labour Party, making the competition between the SNP and Labour the defining feature of the Scottish party system.

Unlike Scotland, Catalan nationalism has always been organizationally plural and fragmented. While CDC was the hegemonic party of Catalanism in the post-Franco period, ERC began to rise again in the 1990s, and although *Esquerra Independentista* weakened due to internal splits, it managed to maintain its presence. On the other hand, CDC, which was founded as a broad church party open to all wings of Catalan nationalism from its inception, consistently embraced diverse positions on both territorial and socio-economic dimensions. Nevertheless, during this period, under Pujol's leadership, the party adopted a politically autonomist and economically centrist strategy. For two decades, the Catalan party system was

characterized by a political stability, primarily defined by the rivalry between CDC and the federalist, social-democratic PSC. The subsequent chapters will demonstrate how these three variables became decisive factors in the radicalization of CDC and SNP's party strategies.



CHAPTER 5

LIMITS OF BARGAINING IN CATALONIA

Nearly two decades after the 1978 Constitution came into force, views on Spain's decentralized territorial system were generally optimistic. Arguments were prevalent that Spain had transformed from a unitary state to “incomplete federalism” (Agranoff, 1996) and, under the influence of “Europeanization,” was progressing from “competitive regionalism” to “cooperative federalism” (Börzel, 2000). Indeed, through negotiations with the central government, the Generalitat had significantly increased its competencies, the decentralization process had advanced in other regions as well, and the regime of autonomous communities generally appeared to be functioning well.

However, these optimistic analyses did not last for more than a decade. By the 2010s, Spain found itself caught in a spiral of crisis. The country faced one of the most severe economic downturns in its history, while the two-party system collapsed, leading to a government crisis in an increasingly fragmented political landscape (Gray, 2020). The dialogue between Barcelona and Madrid broke down completely, and for the first time, secessionism became a majority tendency in Catalonia. How could the so-called “Spanish model” success story have unraveled in such a relatively short period? And how did this collapse occur during the leadership of the centrist CDC, a key player during the “success story” period, which later emerged as the most prominent advocate for the independence referendum in 2017?

I already examined the origins of these questions in the previous chapter. I delved into the ambiguous and fragile characteristics of the Spanish territorial regime and mentioned that, as early as the 1990s, the boundaries of the autonomous

communities regime began to be questioned within CDC, and a sovereigntist tendency started to rise. In this chapter, I will focus on how the bargaining mechanism between the central government and the Generalitat broke down, how this collapse influenced the radicalization of the CDC's party strategy, and how this relationship turned into a matter of contentious politics. At the same time, this chapter will examine the internal dynamics of secessionism and the evolving party system in Catalonia to better understand CDC's stance toward the central government up until the non-binding popular consultation on independence on November 9, 2014. The differences and party competition within secessionism on the eve of the referendum will be examined in detail in Chapter 8. In this sense, this part will serve as a background chapter for the relevant section.

5.1 Recentralism and the end of possibilism

At the end of the 1990s, the CDC leadership experienced both pride and concern (Pujol, 2012). On one hand, CiU had maintained uninterrupted rule in the Generalitat since 1980. During the 20 years under CiU's administration, a strong autonomous government and national identity had been built, following 40 years of Francoism's anti-Catalan repressive policies. However, CiU was reaching the end of its golden age and faced significant challenges to maintain its hegemony in Catalonia in the new millennium.

In the 1995 elections, CiU lost the absolute majority it had held in the Catalan parliament for 11 years. However, CiU's single-party rule continued with the support of PSC deputies, under an agreement with the PSOE in the central government. After the PP won the 1996 general elections without an absolute majority, *el Pacto del Majestic* was signed between CiU and PP. According to this agreement, CiU would

support PP in the national parliament, while PP would support CiU in the Catalan parliament. Despite PP representing outright Spanish nationalism, there was a notably positive relationship between CiU and PP during this period. In Catalonia, where the left was traditionally strong, CDC had a transversal, “catch-all” nature, with strong pro-business, liberal, pro-European, centrist, and even center-right tendencies within the party (Marcet & Argelaguet, 1998)¹⁸. Therefore, there were various similarities between PP and CDC in terms of economic and social policies.

In the 1999 Catalan parliamentary elections, CiU's vote share continued to decline, and for the first time, it fell slightly behind PSC in terms of vote count. However, CiU maintained its power with the support of PP. On the other hand, PP's absolute majority in the national parliament following the 2000 general elections shifted the balance between the two parties in favor of PP. While CiU still needed the support of PP deputies in Catalonia, PP was now in a more advantageous position. Under this political landscape, according to PP leader Aznar, the decentralization process was over (Astudillo & García-Guereta, 2006, p. 414). If CiU wanted to increase Catalonia's competencies, then it should have directly join the PP government. In fact, PP even suggested that CiU dissolve itself and merge with PP (Mas, 2020).

During this period, under the strong leadership of Aznar, the PP attempted to reformulate Spanish nationalism with the concept of "constitutional patriotism," shifting from a defensive to an offensive stance. This concept aimed to reconcile Spanish nationalism, which had lost its legitimacy due to the legacy of the Franco era, within the boundaries defined by the 1978 Constitution, embracing Spain's

¹⁸ The fundamental characteristics of CDC have always been controversial. While the PSC, ICV, and other left-wing groups often labeled CDC as the “nationalist right,” the CDC rejected this characterization, presenting itself as a “national” party.

decentralized and "plural" nature (Núñez Seixas, 2012, p. 14). However, it argued that sufficient concessions had been made to the autonomous communities and nationalities, and it was now time to strengthen the central state apparatus.

In this context, the Aznar administration sought to include Catalan nationalists in its neocentralist project. However, the CiU leadership had no intention of joining the central government or merging with the PP. Despite the increasing tension between the two parties however, cooperation in the Catalan parliament continued.

According to Artur Mas (2020), PP's neocentralism was one of the main factors in the end of the "autonomic mentality":

The threat that decentralization had ended was not just words. The PP showed this true face during its second term. It closed the door to any progress in the autonomic field, and in doing so, provoked the opposite reaction in Catalonia. If it had continued and deepened decentralization and the transfer of powers, it is very likely that the issue of the second Statute would not have even been raised.

In the face of the PP's offensive strategy, the initiative to reform Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy became the main political agenda during and after the 2003 regional elections. Both major competitors, PSC and CiU, promised to renew the Statute in their election campaigns (Barberà & Barrio, 2006). On the other hand, CDC and consequently CiU entered the 2003 elections with significant renewal and a new leader. In fact, the 1999 Catalan elections and the 2000 general elections were significant warnings for CDC. The party's undisputed leader, Pujol, was convinced that the party needed a new face and decided to prepare for the post-Pujol era (Pujol, 2012). The first step in this direction was the election of Artur Mas as the party's general secretary at CDC's 11th Congress in 2000. Thus, Pujol indicated that he saw Mas as his successor.

The congress also highlighted a significant division within the party regarding the alliance debate (Sallés, 2016). The collaboration with the PP was causing discontent among the nationalist base and negatively affecting CiU's vote. According to Argelaguet (2016):

Convergència i Unió realized that the governability pact at the Spanish level had caused it electoral wear and tear, in addition to the natural wear and tear from years of governing in Catalonia. It is a party that is in power, but the agreement with Madrid weakened it. Meanwhile, Esquerra Republicana was already growing with demands for independence.

One faction of the party advocated ending the alliance with the PP and forming a new alliance with the ERC. Concurrently, the ERC was urging CiU to dissolve its partnership with the PP and collaborate with the ERC for parliamentary support (Castro, 2011). However, Pujol and the majority faction preferred to maintain cooperation with the PP. Various party members, including the former secretary general, Pere Esteve, resigned and joined the ERC because of the CDC's continued collaboration with the PP ("Muere el ex secretario general", 2005).

In 2001, Jordi Pujol announced that he would not run in the upcoming elections. However, the question of who would lead CiU after Pujol caused a crisis between the CDC and the UDC. Josep Antoni Duran i Lleida, the UDC leader (the alliance's junior partner), believed he should succeed Pujol. After Pujol indicated that Mas would be his successor, Duran i Lleida resigned from his position as a minister in the Generalitat (Duran i Lleida, 2019). CiU transformed from an electoral alliance into a federation to resolve the crisis. Duran i Lleida was elected secretary general of the federation, while Artur Mas was appointed as first minister in the regional government (Barberà & Barrio, 2006).

The succession crisis within CiU also had political dimensions. While UDC formally advocated for a confederative relationship between Catalonia and Spain, its

practical policies were more in line with moderate autonomism. Josep Antoni Duran i Lleida was a prominent figure in Madrid's political scene and defended the importance of avoiding a confrontational approach with the central government (Barrio & Barberà, 2011). In contrast, CDC was on the cusp of transitioning from an autonomist and moderate strategy to a more assertive and sovereigntist stance. This political difference would intensify in the coming years and eventually lead to the dissolution of the alliance between the two parties in 2015.

Meanwhile, the 2003 regional elections yielded results similar to those of 1999. PSC, led by Maragall, secured 31.2% of the vote, narrowly surpassing CiU, which received 30.9%. However, with 46 seats, the CiU again had the largest representation in parliament compared to PSC's 42 seats. Nevertheless, this time, PSC managed to forge a “left coalition” with ERC and ICV, enabling them to take control and bring an end to CiU's 23-year rule in the Generalitat. After the elections, these three parties signed a pact known as “*el Pacte del Tinell*.” This agreement emphasized the need for a new legal framework that explicitly recognized the state's multinational, multicultural, and multilingual nature. To achieve this, they argued for the reform of Catalonia's status, which was adopted in 1979 (Marcet, 2014).

Against the charismatic Maragall, CiU, led by Artur Mas, was unable to reverse its electoral decline in its first election under his leadership. In the 2003 elections, CiU's vote share decreased by 7 points to 30.9%, while ERC experienced a significant increase, gaining nearly 8 points and securing 16.4% of the vote, marking its highest share of the vote in the post-Francoist period.

Table 6. The Catalan Parliament Elections (2003-2017)

Year	CiU	PSC	ERC	ICV	PP	C's	CUP	SI	Part.
2003	30.9	31.2	16.4	7.2	11.89				62.5
2006	31.5	26.9	14.0	9.5	10.6	3.0			56.0
2010	38.5	18.3	7.0	7.4	12.3	3.4		3.3	60.0
2012	30.7	14.4	13.7	9.9	13.0	7.6	3.5		67.8
2015 ¹⁹	39.6	12.7	39.6	8.9	8.5	17.9	8.2		75.0
2017	21.6 ²⁰	13.9	21.4	7.5	4.2	25.4	4.5		79.1

In addition to ERC's electoral success, ICV saw a significant increase in its vote share, nearly tripling it from 2.5% to 7.2% in just four years. Furthermore, PP managed to expand its voter base with an 11.89% share of the vote, attracting conservative and immigrant voters and solidifying its position within the Catalan party system. Consequently, the 2003 elections not only marked the end of CiU rule but also signaled a new phase in the fragmentation of the Catalan party system (Marcet, 2014). This new process opened the door to a seven-year left coalition government, characterized by its inconclusive efforts to reform Catalonia's status, and the renewal process within CDC while in opposition.

5.2 Failure of stature reform

CiU's status as the hegemonic party of Catalan nationalism was diminishing with the rise of ERC. This trend was confirmed in the general elections of March 2004. CiU's number of deputies decreased from 15 to 10, while ERC's number of deputies

¹⁹ In these elections, CDC, the main partner of CiU, and ERC ran together on a joint list under the name Junts pel Sí (JxSí, Together for Yes). As for CiU's junior partner, UDC, it participated in these elections under its own name for the first time. However, it only secured 2.5% of the vote, failing to surpass the electoral threshold.

²⁰ Following the dissolution of CiU in June 2015, the majority faction of CDC participated in these elections under the Junts per Catalunya (Junts, Together for Catalonia) electoral list.

increased from 1 to 8. The difference in votes between the two parties compared to the 2000 general elections also decreased from 800,000 to 200,000 (Castro, 2011).

The intensifying competition between CiU and ERC for the leadership of Catalan nationalism accelerated CDC's strategic renewal process that began in 1995. The 13th Congress in June 2004 elected a young and more radical direction under the new leadership of Mas and voted for a more sovereigntist and confrontational political orientation (Quadrado, 2004).

Under the tripartite government, CiU was the main opposition party in the Catalan parliament. CiU's leader, Mas, led a fierce opposition to the government, promoting its status as "the largest political party in parliament" and attempting to provoke divisions between the three governing parties.²¹ The intense tension between the government and CiU notwithstanding, the reform of the statute required the approval of two-thirds of the parliament. Therefore, the tripartite government needed CiU's support to fulfill its promise of statutory reform. Discussions on the reform of the statute began in the Catalan Parliament in February 2004 and concluded in September 2005.

The tripartite government's reform plan had three main objectives. Firstly, it aimed to politically recognize Catalonia as a distinct national entity within the Spanish state. Secondly, it sought to elaborate and extend the level of autonomy of Catalan institutions, providing a higher degree of protection from intervention by the Constitutional Court. The third objective was to increase the autonomous community's financial power (Requejo, 2010). However, the process of drafting the new statute evolved into a contest between the CiU and the ERC "over who

²¹ Tensions peaked in Parliament during the debate regarding the collapse of a subway construction in Barcelona. During the discussion of this project, which had commenced under CiU's governance, Maragall accused CiU of corruption and bribery, stating, "You have a problem, and that problem is called three percent." (Marcet 2017b)

represents Catalan nationalism,” resulting in a draft statute that turned out to be much more radical than PSC had initially anticipated (Barrio & Rodriguez, 2017).

Nonetheless, after extended negotiations and parliamentary debates, the regional government parties and CiU managed to reach an agreement. The government presented the final version of the draft statute to the parliament in September 2005, and all parties, except PP, voted in favor of reforming the statute (Colino, 2009).

Following the change of power in Catalonia in 2003, another change took place in Madrid after the 2004 general elections. PSOE's unexpected electoral victory marked the end of PP's eight-year rule. This shift in power had significant implications for Catalonia, creating a more favorable environment for negotiations regarding the reform of the statute. In fact, PSOE's secretary general, Zapatero, expressed his support for reforming Catalonia's status during the electoral campaign (Castro, 2008). Thus, the second stage of the reform attempt, the discussion of the reform project in the *Cortes Generales*²², began under PSOE's minority government, supported by ERC, radical left IU-ICV, and other minority nationalist parties.

PP, now the main opposition, was firmly against Catalonia's status reform and conducted fierce opposition during the parliamentary discussions. According to Mariano Rajoy, who became PP's new leader following Aznar's resignation after the general election defeat, the autonomous communities already had so much power, and the territorial problem stemmed from Basque and Catalan nationalists no longer being loyal to the Spanish constitution:

In my view, the territorial debate began to become a serious problem when the nationalists decided to disregard the principle of constitutional loyalty and clearly exceed the limits of the Constitution that had allowed for the highest level of self-government for the Autonomous Communities, not only in Spain's history but also in most democratic countries. A complex state like Spain, decentralized, where the Autonomous Communities manage

²² The *Cortes Generales*, or the Spanish Parliament, are Spain's bicameral legislative chambers consisting of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate.

practically the same public spending as the sum of the central State Administration and local governments, can only function satisfactorily under the principle of loyalty, a virtue that goes beyond mere consensus. (Rajoy, 2019)

Within PSOE, there were also differing views on the reform. One faction of the party believed that it made too many concessions to Catalan nationalists. Moreover, despite Zapatero's electoral promise to support the statute reform as accepted by the Catalan parliament, PSOE and the president of the government himself found the draft statute, approved by the Catalan parliament, too maximalist, particularly on fiscal arrangements and the definition of Catalonia as a nation. After dozens of meetings between the central government and representatives of the Catalan parties, there was no agreement on the key issues (Muro, 2009).

In negotiations with PSOE, ERC adopted a more rigid and intransigent stance, while CiU displayed a greater willingness to negotiate with the government. ERC's position on ratifying the statute as approved by the Catalan parliament escalated tensions and disharmony within the tripartite coalition (Dowling, 2013). CiU skillfully leveraged this discord within the coalition to assert itself as the major representative of Catalonia in the discussions in Madrid. Simultaneously, CiU leadership vested Artur Mas with full authority over the negotiation process in Madrid. Following an eight-hour secret meeting between Zapatero and Mas on January 22 at the Moncloa Palace, they reached a mutual agreement on the final version of the statute (Marcet, 2017b). This final text received approval in the *Cortes Generales* in March 2006. PP and ERC voted against the draft statute for opposing reasons (Colino, 2009).

As the final stage of the reform process, a referendum was conducted in June 2006 to approve the new status in Catalonia. While 73.9% of the Catalan electorate voted in favor, the voter turnout was only 48.8%. This lower turnout was primarily

due to the fact that after nearly three years of exhaustive discussions, the reform of the statute did not meet the expectations of many sectors of the Catalan population, which the Catalan political parties had mobilized. Additionally, the internal division within the coalition government and ERC's campaign for a “no” vote significantly impacted the referendum results. It is worth noting that the PP's “no” campaign also contributed to the relatively high percentage of negative votes, which stood at 20.7% (Muro, 2009).

ERC's dissenting stance on the final version of the statute reform led to the dissolution of the coalition government and the removal of Pasqual Maragall, the leader of PSC and the President of the Generalitat, whom José Montilla succeeded. Subsequently, early elections were held on November 1, 2006, and CiU emerged as the winning party with 32% of the vote. However, once again, the votes obtained by CiU were insufficient to form a government. Following Maragall's resignation, negotiations between the PSC and the ERC resumed, and the tripartite government continued until 2010 (Castro, 2011).

During this process, PP vehemently criticized the reform initiative, portraying it as a threat to Spain's future. To oppose the project, the party organized petitions and launched a boycott campaign against Catalan products. After the parliamentary majority approved the statute, PP filed an appeal with the Constitutional Court, seeking to annul it. The party argued that numerous parts of the text—including the preamble, 124 articles, and additional and final provisions—were unconstitutional. These contested sections addressed the definition of Catalonia as a "nation," linguistic policies, Catalonia's exclusive powers, the specification of rights and freedoms for Catalan citizens, regulations on foreign affairs, and the framework for its financial system.

The party's appeal to the Constitutional Court regarding the reform statute intensified the political conflict in the following years (Aja, 2014). The announcement of the Court's ruling took four years. It was marked by political pressure and media scrutiny, culminating in a bitter conflict between the "progressive" and "conservative" members of the Court. These four years raised concerns about the Court's impartiality and significantly undermined its credibility and prestige. (Requejo & Sanjaume, 2013)

While awaiting the Court's decision on the status, the debate over the strategic orientation within CDC deepened. The 2006 election results did not meet the party's expectations. The moderate faction of the party criticized Mas' radicalized policies and advocated a return to CDC's traditional line (Marcet, 2017b). In contrast, the Mas leadership argued that the party's strategy needed to be clarified with a sovereigntist perspective. In preparation for the 15th Congress in 2008, Mas organized a conference titled "A Source of Energy and Bridge of Hope for a Better Catalonia," which drew over two thousand attendees ("Mas plantea el 'derecho a decidir'", 2007). In his address, Mas contended that the foundational phase of Catalanism had concluded and needed to be refounded based on the concept of the "right to decide." It was during this conference that the term "right to decide," which would go on to become a hallmark of Catalan politics in the subsequent years, was first articulated by Mas. Mas extended invitations to various sectors of Catalan nationalism to establish "The Meeting House of Catalanism" with a sovereigntist stance (Mas, 2008).

In fact, the call for "The Meeting House" aligned with *Convergencia's* founding philosophy. Under Pujol's leadership, CDC aimed to unite various sectors of Catalanism, spanning from social democracy to Christian democracy, with the

objective of building Catalonia's self-governance. Almost three decades after CDC's inception, Mas advocated for Catalanism to embrace “new horizons” with a sovereigntist strategy. Through this approach, Mas sought to, on the one hand, appeal to those uneasy about ERC's collaboration with PSC.²³ On the other hand, he aimed to reconstruct Catalanism around CDC by promoting a “national sovereignty” program for Catalonia in opposition to the symmetrical federalism advocated by the PSC and ICV (Marcet, 2017b). The 15th Congress of the CDC endorsed Mas's strategy and roadmap, emphasized that Catalonia will be “a free and sovereign nation” in Europe, and solidified the party's organization and its commitment to regaining power after the 2010 regional elections (Gisbert, 2008).

On July 9, 2010, the Constitutional Court delivered a landmark verdict. It declared 14 articles of the Catalan statute to be unconstitutional and reinterpreted 27 others. The Court ruled 14 articles unconstitutional and subjected 27 others to its own interpretation. On the issue of defining Catalonia as a “nation,” the Court determined that the term “nation” held no legal significance but merely reflected the sentiment of the region. Regarding the Catalan language, the provisions designating Catalan as the “preferred language” in administration and media, as well as the obligation to know it, were removed. The Court stated that Catalonia's residents cannot be compelled to know Catalan. Additionally, the Statute's regulation that limited the scope of the central government's “fundamental laws” on regional matters was nullified. The Catalan Council of Justice was also deemed unconstitutional, as it would have granted Catalonia an autonomous judicial power. Concerning financial matters, the Court invalidated the regional government's legislation on local taxes

²³ A significant portion of ERC voters viewed PSC not as a Catalanist party, but rather as an extension of PSOE, controlled from Madrid. Consequently, they favored a “Catalanist coalition” with CiU over a “left coalition.” (Castro 2011)

and the provision requiring all autonomous communities to make equal financial efforts to benefit from interterritorial solidarity funds (Baglioni, 2013).

This decision was a defining moment for Catalan nationalists, creating an emotional rupture with the Spanish state. According to Joaquim Colominas, a professor of political science at Barcelona University, ex-director of CatDem Foundation (a think-tank close to CDC) and an active militant of CDC since his youth, “this decision removed the ambiguity of the Constitution”:

The constitution of 1978 was the product of an agreement between democratic forces and Francoist state apparatus. Therefore, it is an ambiguous, unclear document. On the one hand, it recognizes the existence of nationalities, but it also underlines the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation. Until 2010, in Catalonia there was a majoritarian expectation that, through legal reforms, Catalan people would become sovereign in her territory. However, the decision of the CC on the statute reform of Catalonia ended any possibilities of legal reform within juridical system of the Spanish state. In other words, this decision removed the ambiguity of the Constitution. Now it is clear that, the right of self-determination of Catalonia is not possible within Spain (Author Interview with Colominas; 22.06.2022).

Moreover, it was not solely a concern for Catalan nationalists but resonated with the overwhelming majority of residents in Catalonia who perceived the Constitutional Court's intervention as an affront to the political will of the Catalan people (Dowling, 2013). The subsequent day, approximately one million Catalans congregated on the streets of Barcelona, rallying under the banner “We are a nation. We decide” to express their profound discontent with the Court's ruling (Cramer, 2014). This mass demonstration exemplified the widespread sentiment of the Catalan people.

The decision by the Constitutional Court also dealt a significant political blow to PSC and the tripartite government, which had championed the cause of the status reform. With the status reform now defunct, PSC's territorial agenda became unclear. Meanwhile, internal disputes and divisions within the tripartite coalition continued to deepen (Marcet, 2014).

In contrast, CiU had a well-defined proposal that they had put forth in their electoral campaign several months prior. Their proposal centered on granting Catalonia fiscal autonomy akin to what the Basque Country and Navarre enjoyed (Gray, 2016). Given the deepening economic crisis that had started in 2007 and the escalating fiscal transfer debates between the central government and the Generalitat, CiU's proposal resonated with a significant portion of the Catalan electorate. In the regional elections held shortly after the Constitutional Court's ruling in November 2010, CiU secured a resounding victory. After seven years in opposition, they returned to power under Mas' leadership.

5.3 The quest for a fiscal pact

Starting from the mid-1990s, references to self-determination began to appear in the CDC's congress texts, although an autonomist strategy continued to dominate the party's everyday politics. During the statute reform process, stronger signals of a shift from autonomism to sovereigntism began to emerge. The collapse of the statute reform process had also decisive impacts on the CDC's strategy, discourse, and daily politics. The 2010 elections can be considered a turning point in this context. For the first time, CiU emphasized the "right to decide" in its election campaign and ran an aggressive and ambitious campaign with demands for fiscal sovereignty.



Figure 6. Examples of CiU campaign images ²⁴
Source: El Periodico, 24.01.2010, p. 22

²⁴ The smile symbol was the key figure used in CiU's campaign. In the visuals used the election campaign, in the second image from the left, we see Catalonia sad with the Spanish flag, while in the

At the end of a period in which the components of the Tripartite were demoralized and CiU ran a successful campaign with a strong desire to return to power, CiU achieved a significant victory, while PSC and ERC suffered heavy defeats. With only 18.3% of the vote and 28 seats, PSC experienced its worst results since 1980. ERC, which had been on the rise during the 2000s, saw a reversal in its fortunes and lost half of its votes. ICV, on the other hand, suffered a relatively minor decline, managing to attract some former PSC voters (Botella, 2011).

Garnering 38.5% of the vote and 62 deputies, CiU achieved a significant victory. Nevertheless, it fell short of securing an absolute majority in parliament. Thanks to PSC's abstention, Artur Mas was elected as the 129th President of the Generalitat. PP also emerged as a winner of the election, securing 12.3% of the vote and 18 deputies. With this outcome, PP became the third-largest party in parliament after CiU and PSC (Botella, 2011).

The most pressing challenge for the new CiU administration was how to navigate the economic crisis. The Generalitat's budget was burdened with heavy debt, and the government was unable to secure new loans from the open market (Carrera et al., 2018). Confronted with this predicament, CiU's strategy involved implementing a stringent austerity plan. This plan aimed to curtail social and public spending to rescue the regional government budget from financial insolvency (Mas, 2020). CiU also pledged to reinvigorate the economy through "business-friendly" measures, including tax cuts and eliminating inheritance taxes (Marcet, 2017b).

third image from the left, we see it smiling with the Catalan flag. The first image from the left references the rock band Kiss, and the fourth image from the left references Mr. Spark from Star Trek. These visuals suggest a rebellion of the figures in front of the Spanish flag.

The fiscal pact was another facet of CiU's strategy to overcome the economic crisis. CiU contended that the annual gap between Catalonia's contribution to the central budget and its share was around €15 billion. This deficit accounted for 8% of Catalonia's national income (Castells 2014). Consequently, CiU advocated for the elimination of this imbalance by giving the Catalan government a sovereign role in tax collection and infrastructure spending. Meritxell Borrás, a prominent leader of CDC and minister of Governance and Institutional Relations in the Catalan government between June 2015 and October 2017, synthesizes this position of the party as follows:

There is a very negative economic arrangement for Catalonia, which greatly limits our real policy, social, and other possibilities. If you don't have the money to do something, then you can't do it. Catalonia loses more than 16 billion euros every year. That's 16 billion euros collected in taxes that are not returned to Catalonia. This was an issue we wanted to address upfront by asking for a fiscal pact, meaning an agreement to decide what to do with Catalonia's taxes. But this was non-negotiable. Spain did not allow it. (Interview with Borrás, 11.11.2022)

Meanwhile, CiU's electoral triumph in the 2010 regional elections extended to the local and general elections of 2011. In the May 2011 local elections, CiU secured the municipality of Barcelona for the first time, putting an end to the PSC's 32-year rule in the city. In November 2011, it emerged as the leading party in Catalonia, surpassing PSC for the first time in general elections. Nonetheless, these victories were more a result of the significant decline of PSC rather than a substantial expansion of CiU's electoral base (Marcet, 2017b).

The 2011 general elections marked the end of the 7-year rule of the PSOE, and PP secured victory with an absolute majority in parliament. However, PP's majority government didn't bode well for CiU's fiscal pact initiative. PP's negative stance on status reform and its anti-Catalanist campaign had significantly strained its relations with CiU. Nonetheless, there was alignment between PP and CiU when it

came to economic policies and austerity measures during the crisis. In 2011, CiU's budget, which included drastic austerity measures, received approval from the Catalan parliament with the support of PP. Similarly, PP's 2011 budget, which outlined a more severe austerity plan than PSOE, was voted in favor by CiU in the *Cortes Generales* (Perez, 2022). The renewal of relations with PP based on economic policies raised questions about the potential for progress between PP and CiU regarding the fiscal pact.

Simultaneously, in Catalonia, as I will examine in detail in Chapter 7, there was significant street activism. On the one hand, the massive 15-M or *Indignados* movement, protesting against austerity policies and traditional mainstream political parties across Spain, was particularly robust in Barcelona. CiU's vigorous implementation of the austerity plan, citing “no alternative,” triggered a substantial backlash and eroded its electoral support (Muñoz, 2013). On the other hand, the national mobilization in Catalonia for the “right to decide” gained momentum. Following the failure of the status reform and PP's absolute majority rule, the movement transitioned from ambiguous sovereignism to explicit secessionism (Argelaguet, 2014). During Catalonia's national day, known as *Diada*, on September 11, 2012, over 1 million people marched under the banner “*Catalunya, el nou Estat d'Europa*” (Catalonia, the new state of Europe).

A week after this historic mobilization, Artur Mas and Mariano Rajoy met in Madrid to negotiate CiU's demand for a fiscal pact. During this meeting, Rajoy declared that he was entirely opposed to negotiations on the fiscal pact, arguing that it was unconstitutional (“Rajoy ofrece diálogo”, 2012). This unfruitful meeting between Rajoy and Mas marked another turning point in the relations between Barcelona and Madrid. After the failure of the Statute reform, the doors also closed

on the fiscal pact initiative. Within the existing limits of the Spanish Constitution, there was no longer any project for the CDC leadership to negotiate with Madrid.

Following this meeting, Mas and the CDC leadership faced a crucial decision: either return to the old moderate and possibilist stance or join the rising secessionist movement. The first option would likely lead to CDC's disappearance from the political scene for many years. The second option was fraught with risks and meant stepping into an uncertain future. Under Mas's leadership, CDC chose the latter path, embarking on a new phase towards sovereignism. With Mas' own words: "It was about moving from the stage of autonomy, which had been defended for decades, to the stage of sovereignty." (Mas, 2020)

Accordingly, in response to Rajoy's categorical no, Mas' move was to call for early elections. CiU's new electoral promise was to hold a popular consultation on the Catalan people's "right to decide." While CiU had not explicitly advocated for independence yet, its electoral program promised the establishment of "state structures" for a transition to a sovereign state, either within or outside Spain. To achieve this, Mas called for the support of the Catalan electorate, aiming for CiU to gain an "exceptional" absolute majority in parliament ("Mas llama a lograr", 2012).

In fact, Rajoy's response was not a surprise for CDC leadership. Given that PP, which championed aggressive Spanish nationalism, held an absolute majority in the national parliament, concessions to Catalan nationalism were not expected. On the contrary, the statements of PP leaders during this period heightened concerns among Catalan nationalists about potential new steps towards recentralization. For example, Rajoy stated that centralization was necessary for the economy to function more efficiently during the crisis (Muro, 2015, p. 25). The PP leader in the Autonomous Community of Madrid declared that the central government should

reclaim the authority over education and healthcare that had been devolved to the autonomous communities (Convery & Ludberg, 2017, p. 400). Most strikingly, the PP education minister stated that their goal was to “Spanishize” Catalan students (García, 2012).

Within this political conjuncture, the 16th Congress of the CDC in March 2012 had already cemented the party's sovereigntist position. The political document "The National Transition," adopted at the congress, envisioned the "construction of state structures" (Gisbert, 2012). Francesc Homs, who presented the text, stated at the congress: "21st century Catalan nationalist sovereignism must act with an attitude of independence and must put forward the idea that Catalonia equals nation plus state" ("El Congreso de CDC", 2012).

CiU's fiscal pact initiative and its reorientation to adopt an offensive, confrontational stance with the central government were well-received in Catalonia. Given the widespread public discontent with austerity measures, this new conjuncture was a breath of fresh air for CiU to maintain its power. Indeed, in the lead-up to the November 25th elections, polls indicated that CiU was on track to secure an absolute majority in parliament. To achieve this goal, CiU launched a powerful electoral campaign with the slogan “the will of a people” (*La voluntat d’un poble*) (“Mas: ‘Catalunya quiere emanciparse’”, 2012). By obtaining an absolute majority in parliament, President Mas hoped to bring the central government back to the negotiating table (Marcet, 2017b).

However, the election campaign, which started well, did not go as the CDC leadership had hoped.

Among various factors, the most significant were the corruption allegations against Mas. A week before the election, the PP-aligned newspaper *El Mundo* published reports about corruption allegations involving Mas' family. Although Mas was later cleared of all these accusations, the reports



Figure 7. *El Mundo* headline on 16 November, 2012: “Police link Swiss accounts of Pujol and Mas to CiU corruption”

had a significant impact on the election campaign. Mas held the PP government and the Spanish state responsible for these reports: “I am referring to the destabilization strategy that the State decides to promote through dirty war, activating its most foul sewers” (Mas, 2020).

Consequently, the election results were a major disappointment for the CiU leadership. Far from gaining an absolute majority in parliament, it lost 100,000 votes and 12 deputies compared to the 2010 election results. Although the CiU remained the top party with 30% of the vote and 50 deputies, it emerged from the elections weakened. In the end, the rise of secessionism led to increased support for parties like the ERC and the CUP, which traditionally advocated for independence rather than the CiU. On the other hand, the election results, which saw a loss of votes for

CiU, brought great joy to the PP (Ellakuría, 2012). However, ironically, the PP now had to contend with a more radical Catalan parliament, the vast majority of which supported Catalonia's "right to decide".

Overall, the 2012 elections marked the beginning of a period where CiU lost the political initiative and was compelled to rely on the support of the ERC to remain in power. During this time, CiU found itself being pulled along by the momentum of the independence movement and other secessionist parties.

5.4 The upheaval of the Catalan party system

The rise of sovereignism and then secessionism significantly transformed the Catalan political party system. Since 2010, the territorial debate was at the center of electoral campaigns more than ever before. This pivotal political issue either shaped the reorientation of traditional political parties or triggered the emergence of new political formations.

The 2012 regional elections demonstrated the upheaval of the Catalan political system (Rico & Liñeira, 2014). Firstly, the CiU proved itself unable to regain its political hegemony after its political reorientation. It faced increasing competition from other pro-independence parties. In subsequent elections, the CiU's electoral decline continued.

Secondly, the ERC reemerged as the second-largest political force. Under the new leadership of Oriol Junqueras, the internal crisis that had arisen during and after the tripartite government was successfully overcome. The party managed to return to its 2006 electoral results, securing 14% of the vote and 21 deputies (Medina & Freixanet, 2013). In the following elections, it continued to expand its electoral base

and sought to become the dominant force in Catalanism, gradually overtaking the CiU.

Thirdly, the PSC, the dominant political party in Catalonia alongside the CiU, began to experience a severe decline. For the first time, the PSC slipped to the position of the third largest party in the parliament, although it still had more votes than the ERC by a margin of 25,000 votes (Liñeira, 2013). The territorial issue led to a significant crisis within the party. One faction of the party advocated aligning with the pro-sovereignty movement and defending Catalonia's "right to decide," while another wing believed in distancing itself from sovereignism/secessionism, as well as opposing the neo-nationalism of the PP. The latter proposed a federal constitutional reform as a "third way." These internal debates led to the rupture of more Catalanist elements from the party. Consequently, the PSC gradually lost its previous influence on the Catalan political landscape (Colomé, 2017).

Fourthly, the CUP became a new phenomenon in Catalan politics thanks to its clear anti-austerity and pro-independence program. In fact, this formation is not all that new. As mentioned before, it comes from the tradition of EI, whose origins go back as far as the 1960s. EI was a marginal current until the late 1990s due to internal divisions within the movement. In the early 2000s, however, the EI restructured itself under the name of CUP and began participating in local elections. Over the years, between 2003 and 2011, its influence in municipalities grew, turning it into a significant political actor in Catalan politics, leading to its participation in the 2012 regional elections (Barberà, 2017).

Furthermore, the electoral landscape witnessed the growth of ICV in terms of votes. They secured 10% of the total votes and obtained 13 seats. ICV's primary focus revolved around opposing the austerity measures implemented by the CiU

government. While they wholeheartedly supported the Catalan people's "right to decide," they did not explicitly endorse Catalonia's independence (Medina & Freixanet, 2013).

At the other end of the political spectrum, the surge in the pro-independence movement led to heightened identity polarization. During this period, the unionist political parties, particularly the Catalan section of the PP, Catalan People's Party (Partit Popular Català, PPC) and *Ciutadans* (The Citizens' Party, C's), gained prominence. PPC, staunchly opposed to Catalonia's "right to decide" and steadfast in defending the unity of Spain, secured 13% of the vote, making it the fourth-largest party in the regional parliament with 19 seats (Rico & Liñeira, 2014). Meanwhile, C's also increased its vote share, attaining 7.5% of the votes cast and nine seats. Founded in 2006, C's initially won 3% of the vote and secured three seats in the 2006 regional elections. It emerged as a party in opposition to Catalanism, criticizing the Generalitat's "abuse of nationalism." Hence, C's managed to attract a segment of Spanish-speaking voters in Catalonia who were uncomfortable with the emergence of Catalan nationalism. Moreover, C's gained prominence not only in Catalonia but also in Spain, at a time of economic and political turmoil, thanks to its "political regeneration" and anti-corruption slogans. These watchwords resonated with voters disillusioned with traditional political parties (Barrio, 2017).

As a result of the 2012 elections, the Catalan political landscape witnessed increased fragmentation and polarization. This new political environment gave rise to multiple areas of competition:

ERC and CiU compete for the Catalan nationalist vote; ERC, ICV, and the CUP are vying for the Catalanist movement and the left; PSC and ICV are above all competing for the moderate left; the Socialists are expected to lose support on several fronts (to CiU, ERC, ICV, and C's); and the PP, CiU, and C's are endeavoring to attract the more moderate voter base. (Marcet et al. 2014: 92)

5.5 Breakdown in bargaining

“We set course for Ithaca, which is the national transition, and on this journey, we want all the boats of Catalonia to be in the fleet.”
Artur Mas, 2012 (in Gisbert, 2012)

In the aftermath of the unsuccessful fiscal pact initiative and the 2012 regional elections, tensions between the Generalitat and the PP government continued to escalate throughout 2013 and 2014. The Generalitat's agenda now focused on holding an independence referendum and "creating its own state instruments" (l'Acord per la Transició Nacional, 2012). The PP government's strategy, in response, was to take no action on Catalan nationalist demands and to play for time, hoping that the wave of independence would eventually dissipate in disappointment. This approach was accompanied by the judicialization and criminalization of the Catalan issue. The PP, leveraging the majority of conservative judges in the Constitutional Court linked to the party, attempted to depoliticize the process by taking every step made by Catalan nationalists to court (Petithomme, 2017; Gray, 2020). Thus, as the bargaining mechanisms between the center and the periphery began to collapse, bilateral relations were shifting from "conventional" to "contentious" politics.

In this context, the primary challenge facing the CDC after the elections was the formation of the government. CiU needed the support of ERC to secure a parliamentary majority. The ERC consented to the new CiU government on the condition that the government would hold a consultation or referendum on independence within a maximum of two years (Barbeta, 2012). Still bearing the bitter memories of the Tripartite period, the ERC declined the CiU's invitation to join the government, instead opting to provide external support to the minority CiU

administration. This option allowed ERC to exert pressure on CiU to advance toward independence, while simultaneously providing grounds for criticism of the CiU government for potential delays or setbacks in the referendum process, as well as its austerity measures.

The first outcome of the agreement between CiU and ERC was the preparation of the "Declaration of Sovereignty and the Right to Decide of the People of Catalonia," presented at the inaugural session of the new parliament in January 2013. This declaration, jointly proposed by CiU, ERC, and ICV, affirmed Catalonia as a sovereign political and legal entity and emphasized the right of its citizens to determine their future. The declaration advocated for dialogue with the central government, European institutions, and the international community and expressed the desire for a referendum on independence. It received approval from 85 votes in the parliament (Morata, 2014).

The term "right to decide," which was included in the title of the declaration, became a defining concept of this period. This expression, which began to be used in the mid-2000s, referred to the right of the Catalan people to determine their own status through a popular referendum. In traditional political jargon and international legal texts, this right is expressed as "the right of nations to self-determination." Particularly after World War II, this concept became a legal norm included in United Nations (UN) documents. While the UN advocated for the principle of territorial integrity of nation-states, it also recognized the right to independence for colonial countries within the context of the right to self-determination. However, the right of national minorities in democratic countries to secede was not included in the concept of self-determination as recognized by the UN (Aja, 2014, pp. 361-364).

Consequently, some jurists and politicians have begun to use the term "right to decide" to refer to the right of self-determination of national minorities in democratic countries²⁵. Beyond a political expression, the "right to decide" was used as a legal term for the first time in Spain in Law 9/2008 of the Basque Parliament, which aimed to reorganize the relationship between the Basque Country and the Spanish State. This law provided for a consultation of the Basque citizens to see if they accepted the initiation of a negotiation process with the Spanish State on the exercise of the Basque people's "right to decide". The Constitutional Court ruled that this provision was unconstitutional because it presupposed the existence of an agent, the Basque people, who had a right to decide equal to the sovereignty of the Spanish people (Fossas, 2016).

After the Basque Parliament approved the law in 2008, this term appeared for the second time in the declaration approved by the Catalan Parliament in 2013. For the PP, however, this declaration was nothing more than a new violation of the Constitution. Consequently, the PP government promptly brought this resolution to the Constitutional Court, seeking its annulment. Subsequently, the Constitutional Court suspended the parliament's declaration of sovereignty. Despite the central government's disapproval and the Constitutional Court's opposition, the Catalan government, along with civic organizations, remained resolute in their commitment to organizing the popular consultation on independence. Thus, the relationship between the Generalitat and the PP government was turning into "lawfare". (Damia del Clot, 2022)

²⁵ However, there is no consensus on what this term means. Some interpret it as giving national minorities the right to secede through a unilateral and binding referendum. Others believe that it gives regional governments representing national minorities the authority to hold popular consultations on their future, but not the right to unilaterally secede (Ferrerres Comella, 2016: 462-470).

The Generalitat also established the Consultative Council for National Transition (*Consell Assessor per a la Transició Nacional*, CATN) in February 2013 to chart the legal course for the "national transition." The CATN served as an advisory body to assist the government, offering guidance on various aspects of the Government Plan, including identifying and promoting the state structures and elements essential for conducting the consultation (Abella, 2014). In this context, the first legal initiative towards holding a referendum took place in April 2014, when the Catalan government submitted a bill to the national Congress. The Generalitat requested the transfer of the authority to hold a referendum based on Article 150.2 of the Constitution²⁶. The bill was rejected with the votes of the PP and the PSOE.

After this rejection, in addition to efforts to find a legal formulation for the referendum, CDC had to confront several other formidable challenges during this period. The most significant challenge was the corruption scandals. Speculations about corruption within the CDC and irregularities in the party's finances had circulated for an extended period. Echoing the allegations mentioned in Maragall's parliamentary speech, there were accusations that the CDC was involved in receiving 3% kickbacks on public contracts. In 2009, a corruption scandal involving the president of the Foundation of *Palau de la Música* revived accusations of the CDC receiving kickbacks from construction companies that secured public contracts, resulting in considerable damage to the party (García, 2018). Furthermore, corruption allegations surfaced against Jordi Pujol Ferrusola, the eldest son of Jordi Pujol, who had been elected secretary-general of the party in 2012. Because of these

²⁶ Article 150.2 (Coordination of Legislative Powers): "The State may transfer or delegate to the Autonomous Communities, through an organic law, powers appertaining to it which by their very nature lend themselves to transfer or delegation. The law shall, in each case, provide for the appropriate transfer of financial means, as well as specify the forms of control to be retained by the State." (Spanish Constitution, 1978)

accusations, Pujol Ferrusola resigned as secretary-general in July 2014. Shortly after this resignation, a significant scandal unfolded, implicating this time the party's founder and historical leader, Jordi Pujol. Publicly admitting to the existence of approximately 4 million euros in undeclared funds in Andorra, inherited from his father and registered in the names of his wife and children, Jordi Pujol's disclosure dealt a severe blow to the CDC's reputation and credibility (Pérez, 2014). These scandals played a pivotal role in the CDC's decision to dissolve itself in 2016 and re-establish itself under a new name. According to Joaquim Colominas:

The impact was enormous, it was brutal because it entailed the decision to end Convergència. In other words, it marked the beginning of the end of Convergència as a party. It was a discussion that was far from unanimous, and it was debated, with a significant portion of the remaining first-generation leaders opposing it. They believed that a distinction needed to be made between the leader and the brand (Convergència), a brand that was very strong, powerful, and good. On the other hand, younger generational sectors believed that as long as the brand remained, they would face political and electoral problems. (Author Interview with Colominas; 22.06.2022)

Another challenge for CiU was the European parliamentary elections in May 2014. The ERC emerged as the party with the highest number of votes, surpassing CiU for the first time with 23.7% of the vote. For CiU, whose vote had declined to 21.9%, these results marked another setback following the 2012 elections (Rios, 2015).

After the elections, the main discussion was about finding a legal way to conduct the referendum on independence. CiU and ERC made a new attempt to hold the referendum by passing a law in the Catalan parliament based on Article 122 of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia²⁷. Meanwhile, President Mas continued to seek a compromise with Rajoy despite all the unpromising circumstances. The two leaders

²⁷ Article 122. Popular consultation: "The Generalitat has exclusive power over the establishment of the legal system, the modalities, the procedure, the implementation and the calling, whether by the Generalitat or by local bodies, acting within their jurisdiction, of public opinion polls, public hearings, participation forums and any other instruments of popular consultation, with the exception of those provided for by Article 149.1.32 of the Constitution." (Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, 2006)

had known each other for a very long time and were on a first-name basis, indicating a certain level of friendship. After Rajoy became prime minister in 2011, several secret meetings had taken place between them to explore possible solutions to the political impasse. Before the 9-N vote, Mas and Rajoy met for the last time in Madrid in July (Mas, 2020). On that occasion, Mas proposed a "non-agreement" to Rajoy:

In practical terms, and from my point of view, the political solution would have been for Mariano Rajoy not to authorize the consultation, but at the same time, not to prevent the vote from taking place either. After all, we were going to call a non-referendum consultation and, as the State would not have given its approval, what would have resulted was merely a symbolic political act that could later be managed and channeled through political negotiation (Mas, 2020).

However, Mas did not receive a positive response to this proposal either. Meanwhile, time was running out for the promised consultation. The draft "Law on Non-Referendum Popular Consultations and Other Forms of Civic Participation" was presented to the parliament on September 19, 2014. The law was adopted with the support of CiU, ERC, ICV, CUP, and including PSC; with the approval of 106 out of 135 deputies (Garcia Pagan, 2014a). Alongside the secessionist parties, the support of ICV and especially PSC, despite the opposition from PSOE, for the law was striking in terms of demonstrating the social legitimacy of the "right to decide." On September 27, Artur Mas signed the decree calling for a consultation on Catalonia's political future to be held on November 9. Voters were going to be asked two questions: "Do you want Catalonia to become a State? If yes, do you want this State to be independent?"

The central government's response was once again swift and unsurprising: the next day, the Council of Ministers convened and decided to present the law and the decree to the Constitutional Court for annulment. The Constitutional Court also met

immediately and unanimously declared the suspension of both decisions.

Nevertheless, the Generalitat was determined to hold the independence vote on November 9, no matter what, while also trying to avoid an open confrontation with the State. To navigate this situation, Mas proposed a new formula: organizing the referendum through a "participatory process", again based on Article 122 of the Statute of Autonomy (Gisbert & Tort, 2014). According to this plan, an association named the National Pact for the Right to Decide would be established. While the Generalitat would provide the necessary resources, the legal organization of the referendum would be managed by this association. This method, inspired by the unofficial referendums held between 2009 and 2011, meant that the Generalitat would not have to sign any decrees, thus circumventing the judicial obstacles (Mas, 2020).

Nevertheless, Mas' proposal was not well received by the other pro-independence parties. The "participatory process" represented a step back from a legal consultation organized by the Generalitat. ERC, and ICV insisted on holding a legal referendum through civil disobedience and popular mobilizations. After the negotiations failed, Mas announced that, without the support of the other parties, ballot boxes would be set up on November 9 through the "participatory process" (Gisbert, 2014b).

Mas' formula also came as a surprise to the PP government. After initial statements of disdain or derision, the PP leadership soon took the decision to the Constitutional Court (Álvaro, 2019). Just a few days before the ballot boxes were to be set up, the Constitutional Court declared the measure unconstitutional. However, the focus of the criminalization was on the President of the Generalitat and his

deputies, and it was understood that law enforcement would not be used to prevent the installation of ballot boxes (Mas, 2020).

On the other hand, Mas' decision for a "participatory process" was met with approval by the pro-independence public, and secessionist social organizations quickly mobilized to ensure the successful organization of the referendum. This positive atmosphere also led other pro-independence parties, which had initially criticized the decision, to join the process and call for participation in the vote (Marcet, 2015).

Around 40% of the electorate in Catalonia, comprising more than 2,300,000 people, participated in the referendum. Approximately 80% of the electorate, or around 1,900,000 people, answered “Yes” to both questions (Cardus i Ros, 2015). Despite all the attempts by the central government to block the referendum and the uncertainties about how the referendum would take place, the level of turnout was considered a significant success by both large sections of the pro-independence movement and the CDC leadership (Garcia Pagan, 2014b).

However, in the aftermath of the independence referendum, uncertainties about how the process would proceed increased. Differences within Catalan nationalist parties and formations, particularly the political rivalry between CiU and ERC, intensified. As I will examine in Chapter 8, competition and conflict within secessionism led to significant obstacles to implementing a coherent territorial strategy. On the other hand, while secessionism was divided in many ways internally, the center was also lacking political stability, and Spanish politics was rapidly heading towards the most severe institutional crisis of the post-Franco period. During this process, Catalan secessionism became one of the axes shaping not only Catalan but also Spanish politics, and the manner in which the political crisis at the center

was resolved had decisive consequences for secessionism as well. In the next section, I will analyze these dynamics developing at the center.

5.6 Institutional crisis in the center

Despite the advantage of having a majority government after the 2011 general elections, the PP faced very serious challenges. Firstly, in response to the depth of the economic crisis, it implemented a much harsher austerity program than what was promised during the elections. This austerity program, which was much more severe than the measures taken by the PSOE, involved spending 42 billion euros from the public budget to bail out banks and introduced new cuts affecting pensioners, civil servants, and wage earners (Gray, 2020, pp. 28-31).

Another major issue the PP faced was corruption scandals. These scandals, which involved various dimensions, from bribes for public contracts to parallel financial structures within the party, drew significant backlash, especially during a period of severe austerity, and severely damaged the PP's credibility (Orriols & Cordero, 2016). The PP's immobility on the Catalan issue and its recentralist policies were another important contentious issue. In fact, the PP was under pressure from two sides on this matter. Left-wing sectors criticized the PP for fueling polarization over the Catalan issue and for not taking any steps toward a solution, while right-wing factions accused the PP government of being too lenient and conciliatory (Rodríguez Teruel & Barrio, 2016).

After the historic electoral defeat of PSOE in 2011 and the rapid decline of the PP while in power, the traditional two-party system in Spain came to an end. New challenger parties emerged as political forces, with Podemos rising to the left of PSOE and C's to the right of PP.

Podemos was founded in early 2014 by a group of academics and social movement activists, emphasizing the need for a radical change in the existing political system. Just a few months after its founding, it surprised many by securing 8% of the vote in the May 2014 European Parliament elections, becoming the fourth largest party. Within only six months of its formation, Podemos had reached over 200 thousand members, making it the second largest party by membership nationwide (Garcia, 2014). Rooted in the legitimacy of the 15-M movement, Podemos centered its platform on anti-austerity policies, including demands of an anti-capitalist nature, such as the nationalization of banks and the refusal to pay "illegitimate" debts. Another distinctive feature of Podemos was its recognition of the "right to decide" of minority nationalities, meaning that it supported Catalonia's right to hold an independence referendum and recognized Spain as a multinational state ("Mover ficha", 2014).

The May 2015 municipal elections already demonstrated the political upheaval in Spain ahead of the general elections at the end of the year. The ruling PP suffered a heavy defeat, while PSOE, which had been in opposition for four years, also experienced significant vote losses. In contrast, candidates supported by Podemos, who entered the elections by forming alliances with local groups, won mayoralties in major cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and Zaragoza. C's also established itself as the fourth largest force in Spanish politics, securing 6.5% of the vote.

The December 2015 general elections marked a turning point, showing the end of the two-party system in Spain. Although the PP emerged as the largest party with 123 seats, it lost a third of its votes and 63 seats, leaving it unable to form a government alone in the 350-seat parliament. PSOE, on the other hand, lost another

20 seats, dropping to 90 seats with 22% of the vote. In contrast, Podemos and its allies gained over 20% of the vote, winning 69 seats. C's also succeeded in securing 40 seats with 14% of the vote.

Thus, the election results left no party with a majority sufficient to form a government. While no party wanted to form a coalition with the PP, the PSOE was split during this process. The party's left wing, led by Secretary General Pedro Sanchez, was determined to prevent another PP government and argued for the formation of a coalition government with Podemos and the minority nationalist parties. The party's right wing, however, was so opposed to Podemos and the secessionists that they would prefer a PP minority government over such a coalition (Çiftçi & Aydın Bergfalk, 2023).

The day after the elections, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias made it clear that the recognition of Catalonia's right to hold a referendum was a red line for any government agreement. PSOE, on the other hand, stated that this stance amounted to "handing the government over to the PP" (Garcia, 2016). Meanwhile, the PP proposed a coalition or agreement with PSOE to "face the secessionist challenge" and defend the "right of all Spaniards to decide on their country" (Montilla, 2016). As for the C's, in addition to advocating for a tougher stance against Catalan secessionism, they called for the abolition of the *fueros* that granted full fiscal autonomy to the Basque Country (Gray, 2020, p. 35). As a result, while the PP was unable to reach an agreement with any party to form a new government, the deep differences between PSOE and Podemos on the Catalan issue prevented a compromise. For the first time in Spain's history, a government could not be formed in parliament, leading to a new general election in June 2016.

The June 2016 elections were also insufficient to resolve the political deadlock in Spain. A situation similar to the 2015 general elections emerged, with minor changes: while the PP increased its vote share by 5% and gained 14 new seats, PSOE's decline continued with a loss of 5 seats. Podemos, which entered the elections in an alliance with Izquierda Unida, representing the traditional radical left, aimed to overtake PSOE and become the second largest party. However, this new alliance did not gain any additional seats, with the two parties' combined total remaining at 71. C's, on the other hand, lost 8 seats, ending up with 32.

In this scenario, the decisive factor was the decision PSOE would make. PSOE could either allow the PP to form a minority government or form a government with Podemos and the minority nationalist parties. While the party's general secretary, Sanchez, favored the latter, the party's executive council had a majority of right-wing members who supported the former. The right wing of the party won this internal struggle by forcing Sanchez to resign, and with the abstention of PSOE MPs—except for 15 who opposed—the PP was able to form a minority government with Rajoy as president (Díez, 2016).

Thus, after the 2015 general elections, the PP managed to maintain its hold on power. However, the PP emerged from this process significantly weakened. It was able to continue as a minority government, having lost its absolute majority in parliament and much of its prestige. At a time when the Catalan government was preparing a unilateral bid for independence, the PP government could only survive with the support of C's and the right wing of PSOE and . This process highlights both the deep divisions and institutional crises provoked by Catalan secessionism at the center and the internal divisions, weaknesses, and limitations in the problem-solving capacity of the state-wide political parties.

Under these circumstances, the PP government had no policy for dealing with the Catalan question beyond hoping that nationalist parties would fail due to their internal divisions and, otherwise, implementing repressive measures. In the next section, I will examine the contention between the PP government and the Catalan secessionist government, how this conflict drove CDC towards a unilateral referendum and then a unilateral declaration of independence, and the repressive measures employed by the PP government in response, along with their outcomes.

5.7 Contentious politics in Catalonia

“When the then-vice president of the central government, Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría of the Popular Party, refused to negotiate in July 2017 because ‘I’m in a position to win ten to zero’.”
Casas et al., 2020, p. 62

Despite all the challenges and the ongoing institutional crisis, the survival of the PP government was not good news for the Catalan secessionists. A government formed by PSOE with the support of Podemos and nationalist parties could have restarted the negotiation process with the Catalan government. Alternatively, a PP minority government dependent on the support of nationalist parties, as it was between 1996-2000, could have launched a new beginning. However, a PP minority government supported by C’s and the right wing of PSOE was one of the worst scenarios for the Catalan secessionists. Thus, following the 2015 general elections and the subsequent institutional crisis, there was no change in the central government's stance.

In this process, a secessionist coalition government was formed in Catalonia, as the dynamics of which will be examined in detail in Chapter 8. After the 9-N referendum, as a result of long and difficult negotiations, CDC and ERC decided to run in the Catalan parliamentary elections with a joint list. The two parties formed a joint list called JxSí, declaring that the next elections would be "plebiscitary" in

nature and that, if the secessionists secured a majority in parliament, preparations would be made within 18 months to establish an independent Catalan republic (Marcet, 2017a). Although the combined vote share of JxSí and CUP, which ran separately, remained at 47.9%, they secured an absolute majority in parliament with a total of 72 seats. With CUP's external support, the JxSí government, led by Carles Puigdemont, the CDC mayor of Girona known for his pro-independence stance, took office on January 10, 2016.

It was clear from the outset that the new parliament would face a contentious process. In its inaugural session on November 9, 2015, the new parliament approved a resolution with the votes of JxSí and CUP, "solemnly declaring the commencement of the process to establish the independent Catalan state as a republic." The resolution announced the initiation of a Catalan constituent process, expressing the intention not to subordinate its decisions to Spanish institutions, particularly the Constitutional Court. It urged the future government to undertake the necessary measures to initiate the "process of disconnection" from the Spanish state (Bolaño, 2016; Garcia Pagan 2015). As with previous decisions, the PP government immediately appealed to the Constitutional Court for annulment, and on December 2, the Court ruled the resolution unconstitutional and void.

The Puigdemont administration faced two major challenges. The first was how to advance the "process of disconnection" despite the categorical rejection from the PP government. According to JxSí's roadmap, within the 18-month period, "transitional laws" would be voted on in parliament, and at the end of the process, "constituent elections" would be held. The primary issue here was that the "transitional laws" were symbolic rather than having any practical significance. The laws approved by parliament in this framework were being annulled by the

Constitutional Court. Another significant issue was the nature of the "constituent elections." Would these elections be a new "Catalan parliamentary election" within the legal framework of the Spanish state, or would they be organized under the autonomous laws of the Catalan government as a new phase of "disconnection" from the Spanish state? This topic was unclear in the secessionist roadmap and was a matter of debate among the secessionists.

Another major challenge that the Puigdemont government faced was how to manage the differences within secessionism and how to move forward with the roadmap accordingly. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, this aspect was at least as difficult as the first -the contention with the central government. Overall, both the lack of progress with the central government and internal tensions led to an impasse in the secessionist roadmap by mid-2016. In order to give new impetus to the secessionist process, Puigdemont's plan was to replace the "constituent elections," which were to be held at the end of the legislative term, with a binding independence referendum. This change would put an end to the legitimacy problem caused by falling short of the 50% threshold in the "plebiscitary" September 2015 elections and to the ambiguity regarding the nature of the "constituent elections" in the roadmap. If the central government did not authorize this referendum, which was almost certain, the Generalitat would proceed with the referendum unilaterally based on its own regulation, even if it had to do so in defiance of the central government's obstacles (Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020). After difficult discussions among the secessionist parties, this plan was accepted. Puigdemont announced the roadmap during his speech in parliament on September 28, 2016. He declared that if no agreement was reached with the Spanish state, the unilateral independence

referendum (*Refendum Unilateral de Independencia*, RUI) would be held no later than the end of September 2017 (Medina et al., 2017, p. 46).

At first glance, Puigdemont's announcement appeared to be a moderation of JxSí's roadmap, which included a unilateral declaration of independence (DUI). Holding a referendum instead of pursuing a DUI could allow for a peaceful and binding process, provided the central government gave its approval. There were also various initiatives by Podemos and personalities from PSC to arrange such a negotiated referendum (Casas et al., 2020). In addition, during this period, the PP government, under the supervision of Vice President Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, launched a "dialogue operation." Sáenz de Santamaría set up an office in the building of the central government delegation in Catalonia and initiated a negotiation process, mainly with Vice President Junqueras. At the same time, Sáenz de Santamaría was also responsible for overseeing the intelligence service (CNI) and preventing the Catalan government from secretly arranging ballot boxes to hold a referendum outside the control of the Spanish government (Ortega, 2018).

However, this optimistic atmosphere did not last long. First, by the end of 2016, legal sanctions against secessionism began to emerge. Criminal charges were brought against the president of previous government Artur Mas, his deputies Francesc Homs and Joan Ortega, and counselor of education Irene Rigau for organizing the 9-N referendum. In addition, the Constitutional Court requested the prosecution of the president of the parliament, Carme Forcadell, former leader of ANC, for allowing a vote on the results of the constituent process investigation commission on July 27, 2016 (Medina et al., 2017, p. 46).

The second important incident was the secret meeting between Puigdemont and Rajoy in Madrid on 11 January 2017. In fact, for Rajoy, the purpose of the

meeting was not to negotiate, but to clearly communicate his government's position directly to Puigdemont. Hence, during the meeting, Rajoy emphasized that the referendum was not even up for discussion and that the government, unlike 9-N, would not allow the referendum to take place under any circumstances. Moreover, while Rajoy acknowledged that there was an issue concerning Catalonia, beyond categorically rejecting the possibility of a referendum, he did not propose any territorial reforms to ease the ongoing tensions. Puigdemont's takeaway from the meeting was: "They won't make any political moves, but through the judiciary, they will do whatever suits them" (Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020, p. 308). This meeting also marked the end of the "dialogue operation."

Thus, it became completely clear that organizing the independence referendum would be considered a "criminal case" by the Spanish state, and if the referendum were to be held, it would happen despite all the police and judicial obstacles imposed by the center. After evaluating the situation, the secessionist leaders agreed to continue the process until the end, with the worst-case scenario being to call early elections to finalize the process (Casas et al., 2020). Once this political will became clear, the Generalitat needed to decide how to organize the technical aspects of the process. The Catalan government and its administrative structures were under heavy surveillance by both the intelligence services and the judiciary. Under these conditions, how would tasks like purchasing thousands of ballot boxes and organizing hundreds of polling stations be carried out while bypassing the Spanish state's blockade? The solution found by the secessionist coalition to manage these "extra-legal" aspects was to form a "general staff" (*estat major*) that would operate in secret (Casas et al., 2020; Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020). This staff, established in April 2017, consisted of members of the CDC and ERC

leadership, as well as trusted independent secessionist figures. Its mission was to ensure that the referendum would take place, overcoming all legal barriers imposed by the Spanish state, at any cost (Garcia, 2018).

Despite all the tensions and temporary crises within secessionism, the Estat Major successfully fulfilled its mission: purchasing thousands of ballot boxes, secretly bringing them into Catalonia, and storing them in safe locations before referendum day. One of the key pillars supporting this clandestine operation was the civic groups' powerful "resource mobilization" capacity, particularly the ANC.

Thanks to the robust social network of these organizations, they managed to carry out this operation in complete secrecy, evading surveillance by the Spanish state. By August, less than two months before the referendum, this clandestine network had already distributed around ten thousand ballot boxes, ordered from China, across Catalonia (Vicens & Tedó, 2018). Meanwhile, within the PP government, Saenz de Santamaría, responsible for "handling" the Catalan issue, confidently reassured PP officials in Catalonia, saying, "Don't worry, there will be no ballot boxes" (Casas et al., 2020, p. 91).

After months of organizational and technical preparations, it was time to shape the legal aspect. On September 6, with the support of JxSí and CUP, the bill for organizing the independence referendum on October 1 (1-O) legislation was submitted to parliament (Blanco & Medina, 2018). The bill passed thanks to the secessionist majority but faced vehement reactions from unionist parties and the central government (Blanco & Medina, 2018). According to the PP government, this was another act of disobedience, and due to the "constitutional importance" of the matter, the Constitutional Court was immediately called upon to annul the Catalan parliament's decision (Garcia Pagan, 2017a). There was nothing new here, as in

previous cases, the CC rapidly invalidated the related legislation of the Catalan parliament. What was new, however, were the preparations made by the PP government to prevent the referendum. The option on the table was the application of Article 155. Article 155 of the Constitution allows, if an autonomous community "does not fulfill the obligations imposed upon it by the Constitution or other laws" or "acts in a way that is seriously prejudicial to the general interest of Spain," with the approval of an overall majority in the Senate, for the dissolution of the autonomous community, and for the transfer of its powers to the central government (Spanish Constitution, 1978).

Although Rajoy had enough majority in the Senate to pass this decision, he did not want to do so without the support of PSOE, and the socialists were not yet willing to support such a decision. Before resorting to this extreme measure, the PP government's policy was to take the necessary police measures to prevent the potential occurrence of the 1-O (referendum). In this context, under the plan called *Operación Copérnico*, around ten thousand *Guardia Civil* (military police) and *Policía Nacional* (national police) personnel were sent to Catalonia.

The judicial process to prevent 1-O was called *Operación Anubis*. Immediately after the referendum bill was approved in parliament, a judicial investigation was launched, and several police operations took place to confiscate the ballots prepared for 1-O. The decisive intervention came on September 20, ten days before 1-O. By court order, the *Guardia Civil* raided several Catalan government offices, and 14 senior officials, including the General Secretary of the Vice Presidency Josep Maria Jové and the Secretary of the Ministry of Economy Lluís Salvado, were arrested. On the same day, national police forces arrived outside CUP's central office and attempted to enter the premises without any court order.

Due to the resistance from CUP militants, the police withdrew without entering the premises. On the other hand, this police operation provoked a significant backlash from the secessionist movement. While the *Guardia Civil* continued its operation inside the Ministry of Economy, more than 40 thousand people gathered in front of the Ministry to protest against the operation. In a highly tense atmosphere, the crowd prevented the *Guardia Civil* from leaving the building for a while, and during the events, three police vehicles were smashed. ANC leader Jordi Sánchez and Òmnium leader Jordi Cuixart also appeared at the protest site, trying to calm the crowd and facilitate the evacuation of the *Guardia Civil* (Tort, Montilla & Vallín, 2017). During this time, the *Guardia Civil* requested assistance from the Catalan government's police force, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, but the *Mossos* refrained from intervening with the crowd (Navarro, 2017). The *Guardia Civil* was able to leave the building after the crowd dispersed in the early hours of the morning. Two days after the events, charges of sedition were brought against the leaders of ANC and Òmnium. (Brunet, 2017)

September 20 marked a new turning point in the relationship between the Spanish state and the Catalan government. The PP government had demonstrated its determination not to allow the referendum to take place, no matter the cost. However, it was evident that the judiciary was also working in this direction, meaning that this was more than just the stance of the PP—it was a state policy. Tension was at its highest within the Generalitat and the *Estat Major*. It was uncertain how far the police and judicial operations would go and whether 1-O could take place despite this encirclement. For secessionist leaders, the worst-case scenario was that people would take to the streets on 1-O with their ballots and turn the day into a massive protest (Casas et al., 2020, p. 103). Meanwhile, preparations would continue as if the referendum were still going to be held.

Ballot boxes, papers, and envelopes had been secretly distributed across Catalonia. But where would the voting take place? Municipalities affiliated with AMI had announced that they would allow their town halls to be used for the vote. However, in metropolitan areas, especially in Barcelona, secessionism was not as strong in the municipalities. The plan for these areas was to hold the vote in educational buildings. However, on September 27, the judge of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia ordered that all educational and municipal buildings be closed on the Sunday of the vote. (Tarín & Navarro, 2017)

The week leading up to 1-O played out like a game of cat-and-mouse between the police forces and the secessionists. For every ballot paper and envelope seized by the police, new ones were printed, and new websites were quickly set up to replace those that were shut down²⁸. Meanwhile, police forces were unable to locate the ballot boxes despite extensive raids. At this point, the PP government and the directors of the law enforcement and judicial forces tasked with preventing the referendum hoped to block the attempt by keeping public buildings closed.

However, an unforeseen development disrupted all calculations for both the central and Catalan governments. Two days before Sunday, October 1, parents' groups and neighborhood associations began preemptively occupying polling stations. They ensured that schools remained open until the day of the referendum, preventing the military police from taking control of the polling locations. An interviewee explains the surprising rise of the popular mobilization:

They [the Catalan government] did not expect that voting would be possible on the day of the referendum. They were anticipating that the schools were going to be closed and people would only take photos with their ballots and would put them in social media, and that's all... What they did not expect was the will of the people. In order to guarantee the voting process, parents

²⁸ "Cyber warfare" was one of the key aspects of the contention. In order to avoid any problems in this area, the Estat Major was receiving support from Julian Assange, who was at that time sheltered in the Ecuadorian embassy in the United Kingdom, and his team. (Casas et al., 2020: 84)

occupied the schools on Friday so that the central government's military police could not close the schools. In fact, thanks to the popular mobilization, schools were open during the day of the referendum. Neither the regional government nor the central government was expecting this popular mobilization. Despite the police repression of the central government, 2.3 million people could vote thanks to the spontaneous organization of ordinary people. This self-organization then took the name of *Comitès de defensa del referendum* (CDRs, committees for the defense of the referendum) and, shortly after *Comitès de defensa del república* (CDRs, committees for the defense of the republic).²⁹

Thanks to the occupation of schools, a total of 1,134 schools across Catalonia were open for voting on the day of the referendum (Casas et al. 2020, p. 111). This mood of mass mobilization also reflected on the day of the vote. From the early hours of the morning, people took to the streets to cast their votes. But in a referendum held without a legal census, where would people vote? To address this issue, the Catalan government announced the "universal census" system just hours before the vote. The government, which announced that 5,343,358 people were eligible to vote, informed citizens that they could find out where to vote by entering their ID number on the relevant website. Additionally, in case of police raids preventing voting at a particular location, citizens could vote at another site. To prevent duplicate voting, polling station officials would record each vote through a mobile app. (Sallés, 2017)

After overcoming this problem, crowds began flocking to the polling stations. Police forces also intervened at various voting locations. However, the number of open polling stations made it impossible for the police to intervene at all of them. Meanwhile, Guardia Civil and Policía Nacional carried out harsh interventions in many places, and from the early hours of the day, images of people being injured while trying to vote caused widespread shock and outrage both in Catalonia and

²⁹ Interview with Esther Alcazar i Fabregat (26.05.2022). Esther was a candidate of CUP as a national deputy in the national elections of 2019. Before her retirement, she was a public school teacher and in the direction of anarcho-syndicalist trade union CGT.

internationally. The Catalan Ministry of Health announced that a total of 844 people were injured throughout the day, two of them seriously. (“Las cargas causan”, 2017)

It became clear from the early hours of the referendum that the PP government's plans, which had insisted for months that the referendum would never take place, had failed. Schools were open, and large crowds were forming long lines to vote. The police's attempts to block the vote and the images of violence only increased the legitimacy of secessionism. By noon, the situation was clear and the failure of the operation to prevent the referendum was certain. In the afternoon, police pressure decreased, and the number of voters increased. As a result, despite all efforts to block it, more than 2.3 million voters cast their ballots throughout the day. This turnout represented approximately 40% of the electorate, with 90% of citizens expressing support for Catalonia's independence.

The result was a defeat for the PP government. Not only had the government failed to prevent the referendum, but the police violence against civilians sparked widespread outcry both within the country and across Europe. For its part, the Generalitat found satisfaction in the larger voter turnout than anticipated. Additionally, the central government's decline in international prestige due to its repressive intervention, coupled with Catalonia's prominent placement on the global agenda, fostered an atmosphere of optimism.

Meanwhile, unions and CDRs called for a general strike on October 3 (3-O) to protest police violence and demand respect for Catalonia's right to self-determination. Police brutality and the political stance of the PP government had provoked strong reactions even among those who were not in favor of independence. It was significant that the leadership of the largest unions, which did not have a pro-independence position, called for a general strike. In response to the strength of this

call, the Generalitat invited employers' organizations, civil society groups and the general public to join the protest, effectively turning 3-O into an "*aturada de país*" (national shutdown or strike). On October 3, life in Catalonia almost came to a standstill. Not only did workplaces stop production, but restaurants and shops remained closed, and CDRs blocked roads, bringing transportation to a standstill (Garcia Pagan, 2017b). 3-O was a new historical peak of popular mobilization after the referendum of 1-O.

The strength of October 3rd was alarming not only for the PP government but also for the Spanish State. In a sign of the severity of the crisis, King Felipe VI, who traditionally did not intervene in daily politics, delivered a televised address on the evening of October 3rd. In his speech, he did not mention the actions of the central government or the police violence, but harshly criticized the Catalan government. The speech, which contained no positive messages about the need for dialogue or the Catalan people, effectively turned the PP government's stance into a state policy and deepened the outrage and disappointment in Catalonia (Garcia, 2018).

October 3 was also the day the Catalan government was expected to unilaterally declare independence. According to the revised roadmap of the Generalitat, if the referendum was successful, the government would declare Catalonia's independence within 48 hours. However, the level of participation in the referendum put the secessionist government in a tough position. The turnout did not constitute a majority that would unequivocally and unquestionably support the declaration of independence. Yet, it was not an insignificant proportion either to abandon the independence roadmap and opt for early regional elections. Therefore, in the hope of starting a negotiation with the central government, the Generalitat opted to defer the declaration of independence. Nevertheless, despite all the pressure

on the central government to engage in a dialogue with the Generalitat, the PP administration remained intransigent after October 1, leaving the Generalitat with two options: either the regional government immediately declares early elections or the central government dissolves the regional government and parliament under Article 155 of the Constitution, holding early elections on a date determined by the central government (Garcia, 2018).

Confronted with this ultimatum, the Generalitat had three alternatives. The first involved the unilateral declaration of independence, with the Generalitat defending this move against the central government through social mobilizations and acts of civil disobedience. This option was discarded to "avoid bloodshed." The second choice was to acquiesce to the central government's imposition and call for snap elections. However, this decision would have amounted to admitting defeat and publicly acknowledging it amid the pressure from the secessionist social movement and the intense competition between CDC and the ERC might have led to "political death." The third possibility was for the Catalan parliament to proclaim a symbolic declaration of independence and then await the repressive measures to be enacted by the central government.

Following prolonged, controversial, and uncertain days in October, as it will be analyzed in the Chapter 8, the Generalitat opted for the third choice, and the Catalan parliament finally declared the Catalan Republic on October 27. Hence, this declaration amounted to nothing more than a symbolic initiative. Shortly after the declaration, the PP government, with the support of PSOE and C's, announced the dissolution of the government and parliament of Catalonia. Within a few days of this decision, a faction of the Catalan government, including President Puigdemont, fled abroad. The remaining government members in Catalonia were arrested on

November 2, facing charges of sedition, rebellion, and embezzlement of public funds (Garcia Pagan, 2017d). Thus, Catalonia's bid for independence in 2017 concluded with the central government's intervention and its leaders' incarceration, echoing the events of 1934. On the other hand, the implementation of Article 155 and the crackdown on secessionism did not result in the erasure of secessionist parties from the political scene. On the contrary, in the snap elections held in December 2017, the secessionist parties once again secured a majority in parliament and resumed governing the Generalitat. However, their primary agenda now shifted from independence to more minimalist demands, such as the release of political prisoners and an end to central government intervention in the Catalan autonomous community.

5.7 Conclusion

There is a striking contrast between the first 20 years of Spain's autonomous communities regime and the subsequent twenty years, regarding the center-periphery cleavage. While the regime's initial two decades were characterized by compromise and negotiation, the new millennium brought first polarization and then territorial crisis to the forefront. This chapter comprehensively examines the breakdown of the bargaining mechanism between the autonomous community of Catalonia and the central government and its impact on the transformation of the CDC's territorial strategy.

The recentralization strategy of the PP government, which came to power with an absolute majority in the Congress of Deputies in 2000, signaled the onset of the future collapse. This strategy exposed the fragility of the regime and triggered the development of a radicalized reaction from the CDC and the Catalan nationalism in

general. Then, during the PSOE administration, the statute reform led by the left-wing coalition government in Catalonia ended in great disappointment and marked a turning point, generating an emotional rupture with the central state for the large segments of Catalanism.

Within this context, the CDC regained power by winning the regional elections, pledging a “fiscal pact,” and reorienting its territorial strategy from autonomism to sovereignism. Simultaneously, both Spain and Catalonia grappled with a severe economic crisis amid the impact of the Great Recession. On one hand, the CDC implemented a stringent austerity program as part of its market-oriented approach to navigate the financial downturn. On the other hand, in a bid to fortify Catalonia's fiscal structure, it sought full fiscal autonomy from the central government, similar to the arrangement granted to the Basque Country. However, akin to the fate of the status reform, the pursuit of a fiscal pact proved unsuccessful in the face of the categorical rejection of the PP administration.

Under the pressure of an emergent and powerful secessionist social movement, the CDC announced early elections, pledging to conduct a popular referendum on Catalonia's territorial status. However, contrary to the CDC's anticipation of securing an absolute majority in parliament, the traditionally independentist ERC and CUP gained strength in the snap elections. The CDC retained power with the parliamentary support of the ERC, contingent on the commitment to hold a referendum on independence within two years at the latest.

Despite all attempts by the central government to block it, the CDC government succeeded to hold a non-binding referendum on independence on November 9, 2014. This “participatory process”, with a participation rate of 43% of the electorate -more than 2,3 million people, demonstrated the strength of the

secessionist movement. However, the turnout also showed that secessionism in Catalonia did not have an absolute majority and, therefore did not have sufficient social legitimacy.

Simultaneously, the CDC grappled with corruption scandals that dealt irreversible blows to the party's reputation, significantly impacting its electoral standing. Confronted with multiple formidable challenges, CDC President Artur Mas opted to call early elections, urging secessionist parties to join forces on a single list to transform the elections into a de facto plebiscite for independence. After extensive negotiations, CDC and ERC, with backing from independentist social organizations, forged an electoral alliance named *Junts Pel Sí*. In the September 2015 elections, JxSí, along with CUP, the independentist and anticapitalist formation running independently, secured an absolute majority in parliament yet garnered 47.5% of the vote.

During this period, the Catalan issue became one of the central points of dispute in Spanish politics, and the party system in Spain, even more severely than in Catalonia, was spiraling into fragmentation and crisis. However, after two general elections and the institutional crisis within the Spanish political regime, the formation of a minority government by the PP with the support of right-wing factions signaled that there would be no change in Catalan policy at the central level. The relationship between the government in Catalonia, which came to power with the promise of pursuing unilateral independence if necessary, and the PP minority government in Madrid, supported by centralist right-wing factions, had now fully transformed into contentious politics. Despite all the attempts by the PP government to block it, the Puigdemont administration, using including "extra-legal" means, managed to hold the referendum on October 1, bringing secessionism in Catalonia to

its historical peak. However, the path forward after the referendum was filled with uncertainties within the secessionist movement. After the secessionist government avoided a definitive rupture from the Spanish state, the Catalan republic was symbolically declared on October 27. Following this declaration, the central government invoked Article 155 of the Constitution, dissolving the Catalan autonomous community and calling for early elections for the Catalan parliament, effectively closing the critical juncture for independence.



CHAPTER 6

LIMITS OF RUPTURE IN SCOTLAND

After two decades under the autonomous communities regime, the limits of the territorial decentralization were increasingly called into question both in Barcelona and Madrid. Meanwhile, during this same period, Scotland was taking historic steps toward self-governance. After more than a century of political struggle for self-governance with ups and downs, the Scottish Parliament opened on July 1, 1999, on the eve of the new millennium. While the Labour Party, the architect of the process, hoped that “devolution would kill nationalism stone dead,”³⁰ the SNP leadership saw devolution as a “stepping stone” towards independence.

While the self-governance emerged much later in Scotland than in Catalonia, the dynamics of territorial crisis unfolded much faster in Scotland than in Catalonia, and both cases experienced the historical rise of secessionism at similar times. This chapter demonstrates how the “increased political opportunities” that emerged for the SNP in Scotland quickly evolved into a process towards independence. Following an eight-year rule by Scottish Labour, the SNP first formed a minority government in 2007 and then secured an absolute majority in 2011, shifting the main agenda from devolution to independence. During this period, the SNP leadership faced the challenge of balancing between being a governing party and an independence party. They sought to manage the tensions between these two roles and develop a strategic orientation as well as day-to-day policies that maintained this balance.

³⁰ In 1995, Lord George Robertson, the future shadow secretary of state for Scotland, mentioned that “devolution would kill nationalism stone dead” (Baldini, 2013: 128)

On the other hand, after Scottish Labour lost power in Scotland in 2007, the Labour Party suffered a heavy defeat in the 2010 general elections. Consequently, the debate over an independence referendum intensified during the coalition period of David Cameron's Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. This chapter also examines Cameron's decision-making process regarding a bilateral independence referendum within the UK's constitutional framework and how this influenced the SNP's strategic orientation. Lastly, it discusses the Edinburgh Agreement signed between the UK and Scottish governments and the SNP's roadmap to independence, the way it shaped the limits of the rupture.

6.1 Home rule era at Holyrood

“The devolved Parliament provided an ideal platform for the SNP message of grudge and grievance. It allowed them to build the case for independence step by step.”
David Cameron, 2020

Thanks to Spain's proportional electoral system, CiU's deputies in Madrid often played a decisive role in forming governments. In contrast, due to the UK's FPTP system, the SNP never had the opportunity to wield "blackmail potential" (Sartori, 1976) in Westminster. The only exception was the October 1974 general election, where the SNP achieved its highest vote share throughout the twentieth century. Even in that election, however, despite receiving 30.4% of the vote in Scotland, the SNP's dispersed vote distribution resulted in only 11 MPs. Devolution was therefore a crucial opportunity for the SNP to make an impact on political life.

On the other hand, while the establishment of the Scottish parliament was a historic step in terms of self-government, it did not emerge in a vacuum, as examined in Chapter 4. Above all, Scotland's voluntary union with England and the subsequent autonomy of various institutions gave the territorial organization of the United

Kingdom a unique character. Although the UK is often defined as a unitary state, Rokkan and Urwin (1982) argued that it should be referred to as a union state. In a union state “integration is less than perfect. While administrative standardization prevails over most of the territory, the consequences of personal union entail the survival in some areas of pre-union rights and institutional infrastructures which preserve some degree of regional autonomy” (Rokkan & Urwin, 1982, p. 11).

Unlike Spanish nationalism, which was based on dynastic conquest and a tradition of centralized territorial organization, British unionists recognized national distinctiveness from the start (Keating, 2009). So much so that even Margaret Thatcher acknowledged Scotland's right to independence:

“As a nation, they have an undoubted right to national self-determination; thus far they have exercised that right by joining and remaining in the Union. Should they determine on independence no English party or politician would stand in their way. What the Scots (nor indeed the English) cannot do [...] is to insist upon their own terms for remaining in the Union, regardless of the views of the others.” (Thatcher, 1993, p. 624)

Based on this legitimacy, Scottish nationalism already had significant achievements in terms of administrative devolution (Mitchell, 2004). The administration of areas such as education and agriculture was under the Scottish Office, overseen by the Secretary of State for Scotland, who held a cabinet position. With the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, these powers were transferred from the Office to the Scottish Executive.

However, the initial period of self-governance, which began with great expectations and euphoria, did not go well. First Minister Donald Dewar passed away in October 2000 due to deteriorating health, just after completing his first year in office. His successor, Henry McLeish, resigned after a year generally considered lackluster due to a financial irregularity that occurred during his tenure as an MP at Westminster (Hassan, 2004, pp. 4-5). Consequently, the Scottish Parliament

witnessed the departure of two first ministers within its first two legislative years. This political instability coupled with a series of administrative scandals under the new Executive, severely damaged the popularity of the devolution project. One of the most significant issues during this period was the extraordinary cost of constructing the new parliament building in Holyrood. Originally budgeted at £40 million, the project ran more than ten times over budget and took much longer to complete than planned, leading to intense media and public criticism (Devine, 2017).

While the Scottish Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition was still struggling to get used to being in power, the SNP was also going through a critical phase. With 35 MSPs, the SNP achieved its highest number of elected representatives in its history and became the main opposition in the 129-seat Scottish Parliament. Many MSPs were entering professional politics for the first time, and the SNP parliamentary group was marked by significant ideological and organizational disharmony (Mackay, 2009, p. 82). In this context, the primary challenge for the SNP was to form a strategic orientation in the Scottish Parliament. Academic expert on Scottish politics, James Mitchell, notes that after a contentious process, the SNP leadership decided to adopt the strategy of becoming a “governing party”:

The key point would be to note the existence of the Scottish Parliament after 1999, because that really transformed things for the SNP. Because it becomes possible for the SNP to be a serious contender to govern, never had such a potential prior to devolution, really. And that, in a sense, was a golden opportunity for the SNP but also a challenge, because or how does it manage, governing strategy with a campaigning strategy for independence? And what it did in the early days of the devolution was essentially come to conclude. It took them time to work this out, that they needed to focus on governing. They wanted to become the largest party, which was the first step in having any kind of referendum or any move forward. They had to show that they were competent and in government. And, and I think that created lots of tensions within the SNP. (Interview with Mitchell, 09.03.2024)

In this period, the SNP also revised its historical criterion for achieving its goal of independence. For many years, the SNP argued that winning a majority of Scottish

seats in general elections was a sufficient condition for declaring independence.

Following such a majority, negotiations for independence would begin with the UK government. After devolution, however, the SNP shifted its criterion from holding a majority of Scottish seats at Westminster to securing a majority in the Scottish Parliament (Brown Swan, 2018, p. 148). Moreover, the SNP introduced the intermediary step of a referendum between voting for the SNP and the option of independence³¹. Even if the SNP achieved an absolute majority in parliament, it would still hold a referendum on independence. This allowed voters to support the SNP in elections without necessarily endorsing independence. Senior policy adviser to the SNP leadership during that period, Stephen Noon explains:

So, the referendum was absolutely part of the strategy as well. When we were asking people to vote SNP, we wanted to take away the sense that voting SNP would immediately mean independence. You could vote SNP secure in the belief that we would be a good government and you would have a second decision later on about independence. The referendum was about enabling people who weren't pro-independence to vote for the SNP. (Interview with Noon, 19.02.2024)

Amid these strategic debates and search for direction, the SNP also faced organizational turmoil during the first legislative term of the Scottish Parliament. Alex Salmond, the charismatic leader who had been heading the party since 1990, unexpectedly announced his resignation as party leader in 2000 and took over as leader of the SNP's Westminster group.

John Swinney, who won the leadership race, faced the challenging tasks of reorganizing the party and guiding it politically during this period of organizational disharmony. Following Salmond's steps in the 1990s to professionalize the party

³¹ The referendum strategy was something that the SNP learned a lesson from the Labour Party. “Because what Labour did in 1997, and coming to power is that they promised a referendum on devolution. If you voted Labour and you were against devolution or skeptical, you could still vote for the Labour Party, because you'd get the chance to vote against devolution” (Author Interview with Mitchell, 09.03.2024).

apparatus, there were longstanding organizational reforms that had been debated but not yet implemented. Swinney prioritized these measures to overcome the organizational and political discord within the SNP (McAngus, 2019, p. 137).

These measures included the election of the party leader and deputy leader, candidates, and list rankings by all members through a one-person-one-vote system, rather than by delegates. The most significant outcome of this adjustment was the weakening of the fundamentalist faction within the party and the further strengthening of gradualism. While gradualism was strong among the party leadership and inactive members, there was still a substantial fundamentalist segment among the active party militants (delegates). Additionally, Swinney proposed that memberships and fees be controlled by the party headquarters rather than local branches, and that a more professional division of labor be established at the party center. Despite opposition from various factions and the risk of earning their hostility, Swinney managed to get these reforms adopted at the party conference in September 2004 (Fraser, 2016). Some viewed these organizational reforms as measures that strengthened the party professionals at the expense of the grassroots and bureaucratized the party. Others, however, believed that the much more professional and successful election campaigns and parliamentary activities owed much to Swinney's reforms (Masseti, 2009a, p. 99; Mackay, 2009, p. 84).

On the other hand, the Swinney era was a genuine failure in terms of electoral performance. In Swinney's first test, the 2001 Westminster elections, the SNP's number of MPs fell from six to five. The 2003 Scottish Parliament elections were a significant defeat for the party, with SNP's seats dropping from 35 to 27. Pro-independence Scottish Greens and SSP, which each had one MSP, increased their numbers to seven and six, respectively. In the 2004 European Parliament elections,

Swinney's leadership could not reverse this trend, and SNP's vote share fell from 27.2% to 19.7%. Following these three consecutive election defeats, Swinney resigned. Reflecting on this period, Swinney acknowledges his personal shortcomings but also believes that the objective conditions were not favorable for the SNP:

I think it was about the fact that the context was not positive about the question of Scottish self-government. So the first term of the parliament, have largely been a disappointment. The three First Ministers in four years, one had died, one had resigned, one had been elected. The parliament building was depressing debate. And the parliament hadn't really changed Scotland out of all recognition. So for the question of Scottish self-government, it wasn't an optimistic period. And I think combined with that, the SNP was looking divided. I don't think I wasn't managing to hold things together, effectively. So people who were natural supporters of ours drifted away to people that made them feel more exciting. And that's why the Greens and the Scottish Socialist Party rose. When it came to 2007, the climate had changed. And the mood for self-government was more optimistic. (Author Interview with Swinney, 05.03.2024)

The same period was also unfavorable for Scottish Labour either, which had been the hegemonic party in Scotland until then. Although the new leader, Jack McConnell, managed to establish relative political stability following Dewar and McLeish, the party lost six seats in the 2003 elections. Despite this loss, the votes secured were sufficient to continue the coalition government with the Liberal Democrats.

Table 7. Scottish Parliament Election Results³²

Years	SNP		Scottish Labour		Liberal Democrats		Conser. vatives		Scottish Greens		SSP		Turnout
33	Con.	Reg.	Con.	Reg.	Con.	Reg.	Con.	Reg.	Con.	Reg.	Con.	Reg.	
1999	28.7 (7)	27.3 (28)	38.8 (53)	33.6 (3)	14.2 (12)	12.4 (5)	15.5 (0)	15.4 (18)	0	3.6 (1)	1 (0)	2.4 (1)	58.4
2003	23.7 (9)	20.9 (18)	34.6 (46)	29.3 (4)	15.3 (13)	11.8 (4)	16.6 (3)	15.5 (15)	0	6.9 (7)	6.2 (0)	6.7 (6)	49.7
2007	32.9 (21)	31 (26)	32.1 (37)	29.2 (9)	16.2 (11)	11.3 (5)	16.6 (4)	13.9 (13)	0.1 (0)	4 (2)	0	0.6 (0)	53.9
2011	45.4 (53)	44 (16)	31.7 (15)	26.3 (22)	7.9 (2)	5.2 (3)	13.9 (3)	12.4 (12)	0	4.4 (2)	0	0.4 (0)	50.5
2016	46.5 (59)	41.7 (4)	22.6 (3)	19.1 (21)	7.8 (4)	5.2 (1)	22 (7)	22.9 (24)	0.6 (0)	6.6 (6)	0	0.5 (0)	55.8
2021	47.7 (62)	40.3 (2)	21.6 (2)	17.9 (20)	6.9 (4)	5.1 (0)	21.9 (5)	23.5 (26)	1.3 (0)	8.1 (8)	0	0	63.5

Overall, during its first eight years of self-governance, the coalition of Scottish Labour and the Liberal Democrats in power projected a mediocre, uninspiring, and colorless image, failing to meet expectations. This was influenced not only by the performance of the Scottish Labour leadership but also by Labour's decline across the UK. Blair's Iraq war policy and the centrist approach, known as “neoliberalism with a heart,” dealt a severe blow to Labour's popularity in Scotland (Hassan, 2019, p. 156). Additionally, the limited powers of self-governance, particularly regarding fiscal autonomy, posed a significant challenge to delivering a distinctive and impactful performance.

³² The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of MSPs obtained.

³³ This row shows the vote share for Constituencies and Regional lists.

Scottish Labour had been convinced of the necessity of devolution throughout the 1980s and 1990s. However, there was neither sufficient discussion nor consensus regarding the content, limits, and evolution of devolution (Hassan, 2019, p. 155). However, during this period, the Scottish Labour government initiated a series of legislative activities that set Scotland apart from the rest of the UK. One of the first significant actions was during Dewar's tenure, when the administration repealed a legal provision that banned local authorities from "promoting" homosexuality. Despite facing harsh criticism from various quarters, Dewar's administration managed to repeal what it termed a "homophobic" clause (Devine, 2017). Another key initiative was the provision of free personal care for the elderly, introduced during McLeish's tenure, despite strong objections from the Labour Party in Westminster (McEwen, 2004, p. 169). Ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom, the Scottish Parliament's decision to ban smoking in public places in 2006 was one of its most controversial measures. Perhaps the most significant reform of this period was the shift to proportional representation in local government elections. This change, made under pressure from the Liberal Democrat coalition partner, on the eve of the 2007 local elections, ended up benefiting the SNP the most due to its dispersed vote base (Cairney, 2011).

Could Scottish Labour have governed more competently and prolonged its incumbency? Kezia Dugdale, the leader of Scottish Labour from 2015 to 2017 and an MSP from 2011 to 2019, addresses this question:

It's quite hard to answer that retrospectively, because you have to remember lots of the big powers that the parliament has now to do things differently, like fiscal powers, like introducing new tax rates or doing significant things with tax powers, didn't exist when Labour were in power. ... I don't think there are big errors in terms of the legislative agenda of the of Labour in the Scottish Parliament. In fact, I still believe to this day, some of the best, biggest and boldest bits of legislation that have gone through the Scottish Parliament happened in those first two terms. Land reform, mental health

legislation, the smoking ban and homelessness legislation... But all of that was still happening at a time where Labour had been in power since 1997 ... So you had a growing gap of discontent around what people thought they would get from the Labour government and what they actually got, and the SNP tapped into that. (Interview with Dugdale, 11.03.2024)

It is true that the SNP was heavily involved in preparing for the 2007 local and regional elections. After Swinney's resignation in 2004, Salmond again ran for the leadership with the goal of transforming the SNP into a governing party and won the presidential election by a wide margin (Mitchell, 2016). Thanks to the organizational reforms introduced during Swinney's tenure, the internal discord and divisions within the party were overcome, and under Salmond's leadership, the SNP united behind its most professional election campaign in history and craved victory in the 2007 elections.

Indeed, in the local and regional elections held on the same day, the SNP achieved a historic victory, becoming the leading party in Scotland. In the first local elections conducted under the single transferable vote system, Labour secured 348 councillors, while the SNP won 361. The most surprising success, however, was the SNP emerging as the first party in the Scottish Parliament elections. Labour lost 4 seats, ending up with 46 MSPs, while the SNP gained 20 new MSPs, increasing their total from 27 to 47.

These results were in line with Labour's nationwide decline. However, in Scotland, where Labour had been a stronghold for decades, this defeat was historic. It was related not only to Labour's general fatigue in power but also to the perceived inadequacy of its incumbency at Holyrood. Other significant losers in the 2007 elections were the Greens and the SSP. With the SNP filling the pro-independence political space, both parties failed to maintain their gains 2003 gains. The Greens were reduced to 2 seats, while the SSP, which had suffered a brutal leadership crisis

and split into two parties just before the elections, lost all its seats. Finally, the Conservatives and the Liberals maintained their previous vote shares (Johns et al., 2010).

Although the margin was narrow between the Labour and SNP, it was sufficient for the nationalists to begin efforts to form a government as the leading party. However, forming a government proved to be a significant challenge. With only 47 seats, they were well short of the 65 needed for a parliamentary majority. The Lib Dems, with whom the SNP had negotiated a coalition, turned down the SNP's offer on the grounds that it had not renounced its commitment to the independence referendum. Under these circumstances, the SNP decided to form a minority government with the support of the Greens' 2 MSPs. Thus, eight years after devolution, the SNP managed to break Scottish Labour's more than 40-year hegemony and come to power. Now, under Salmond's leadership, the SNP faced the dual tasks of delivering an effective government performance, distinct from the Lib-Lab coalition, while also keeping the ultimate goal of independence on the agenda.

6.2 SNP as a governing party

*"'Yes we can' was an SNP slogan in 1997, more than a decade before Obama adopted it in his first presidential campaign."
James Mitchell, 2016*

According to opinion polls, public support for independence did not show a significant increase before or after the 2007 elections (Devine, 2017). Therefore, the dramatic rise in SNP's votes in the 2007 elections stemmed not from a surge in support for independence but by a desire to see a competent government at Holyrood. This public mood aligned with SNP's gradualist strategy of becoming a "governing party" before becoming an "independence party". However, the SNP

leadership faced the challenge of meeting this expectation with a minority government.

Under Salmond's leadership, the first nationalist administration quickly embarked on a series of actions. One of the initial, more symbolic actions was to rename the Scottish "Executive", which had a more administrative connotation, to the more assertive Scottish "Government".³⁴ Following this, ambitious decisions were made, in terms of socio-economic policies, such as abolishing student tuition fees, gradually eliminating prescription charges, and freezing council tax. However, to implement these decisions, the SNP's proposed budget needed to be approved by the parliament. The SNP's budget was approved with the support of the Greens, independent ex-SNP MSP Margo MacDonald, and, ironically, the Conservatives. In return for their support, the Tories secured commitments from the SNP to cut business rates and hire 1,000 new police officers. This support allowed the SNP to reach the required 66 votes (Mackay, 2009, p. 88).

Parallel to launching its social and public policies, the SNP wasted no time in initiating the constitutional debate. In August 2007, the SNP government released a document titled "Choosing Scotland's Future: A National Conversation," which marked the beginning of a "national conversation" on Scotland's territorial status. The SNP leadership was aware that while support for independence was a minority view, the idea of "further devolution" had majority backing. In the document, the SNP emphasized that independence was the best option and aimed to hold a referendum on this matter. However, taking into account the prevailing majority preference, the SNP also expressed openness to enhancing the competencies of self-governance. Therefore, the SNP argued that a referendum should present three

³⁴ Scottish Labour attempted to do the same in 2001 but failed to do so because of opposition from Labour government in Westminster. (MacKay, 2009, p. 87)

options: independence, further devolution, and maintaining the status quo (Scottish Executive, 2007).

This stance highlights how far the SNP had moved away from the fundamentalist strategy encapsulated in the slogan "Independence, nothing less." During this period, the SNP leadership viewed the "positive agenda" rhetoric as a complementary element to its gradualist strategy (Pattie et al., 2011). Stephen Noon, who served as a special advisor to the Scottish Government and significantly contributed to drafting key documents during this time, explains this communicative strategy as follows:

Up until that point, we had two fundamental arguments for independence. One was, "Scotland is hugely rich country": We've got so much potential. You look at our oil wealth and highly educated population. Look at all these things that we have. We should be doing so much better. The other argument which was, "Isn't Westminster terrible": Look how awful things are. Look at the poverty, look at the emigration and kids leaving the country and all this stuff. And we were presenting these two arguments, each of which was coherent in its own right. But when you were presenting them together, they clash. You couldn't simultaneously be arguing Scotland's great and Scotland's rubbish. So we made a strategic decision to argue as much as we could. And none of these things are perfect, but as much as possible on the possibility, the opportunity. Scotland's this great country, we could, but we should be doing so much better, with so much potential. We moved in that period from a mixed message into one where a politics of hope. (Interview with Noon, 19.02.2024)

Following the SNP's historic electoral victory, the National Conversation initiative, set off alarm bells for the unionist parties. In response, the unionist parties moved to establish a commission in the Scottish Parliament to assess the devolution process. This commission, known as the Calman Commission, was created with the aim of reforming devolution. The SNP did not participate in the commission because of the commission's categorical opposition to discussing the independence option. The commission, led by Labour and supported by the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, focused primarily on enhancing the fiscal and financial powers of

Scottish self-governance. Its report, titled "Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st Century," was completed in June 2009. The report was approved by the Scottish Parliament with 69 votes in favor and 49 against, and then submitted to the UK government.

Based on this report, the UK government published a white paper in November 2009 entitled "Scotland's Future in the United Kingdom". This report, under the administration of Gordon Brown, who had taken over as Prime Minister from Tony Blair in 2007 and was a prominent figure in Scottish politics, endorsed the granting of new fiscal and financial powers to the Scottish government. However, the Labour government's decision to postpone legislating these proposals to an unspecified date, rather than enact them before the upcoming general election in less than a year, drew criticism from both opposition parties and the SNP (Hassan & Shaw, 2012).

Five days after the publication by the UK government, the Scottish government released its own white paper titled "Your Scotland, Your Voice." This paper was the culmination of the National Conversation that had lasted over two years (Harvey & Lynch, 2012). While the 2007 White Paper discussed three scenarios, this paper outlined four possibilities for Scotland's constitutional status: maintaining the current situation, devolution based on the Calman Commission's report, full devolution (or devo-max, as it is more commonly called), and full independence. The paper also proposed a draft bill for a referendum (Scottish Government, 2009).

On the basis of this paper, the SNP government published a Bill entitled "Scotland's Future: Draft Referendum (Scotland) Bill Consultation Paper" in February 2010. The 130-page draft included comprehensive and detailed proposals

on the organization of the referendum, its mechanisms, and the ballot papers (Scottish Government, 2010). The bill proposed two questions on the ballot paper. The first question concerned whether more powers should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, offering options for full devolution and devolution as outlined by the Calman Commission. The second question asked whether the powers granted to the Scottish Parliament should be extended to allow it to declare the country's independence. Just as in the 1997 referendum, the SNP advocated for a "Yes-Yes" vote on both questions. On the day the bill was introduced, First Minister Salmond made the following statement:

I believe that the future prosperity and development of our country is best served by Scotland becoming independent, and the Scottish Government would campaign for a 'Yes-Yes' vote in the referendum - 'yes' to more responsibilities for the Parliament, and 'yes' to additional powers to enable independence to be achieved. ... 'Yes-Yes' was the winning campaign in 1997 - and will be a winning campaign for Scotland again. (2010)

With this formulation, the SNP leadership aimed to avoid pitting the devo-max and independence options against each other, similar to what the CDC leadership would do in the 2014 popular consultation. In a context where public opinion polls indicated a majority in favor of devo-max, the SNP hoped to maximize the powers of the Scottish Parliament while keeping the independence option on the table, in line with its gradualist strategy. However, with only 50 out of 129 parliament members supporting the referendum, the bill had little chance of being implemented. In September 2010, the SNP withdrew the bill from parliament and called on voters to give the SNP an absolute majority in the 2011 elections to make the referendum possible (Harvey & Lynch, 2012, p. 98).

While these debates continued at Holyrood, the UK general election of May 6, 2010, marked the end of Labour's 13-year rule. Despite winning 36.1% of the vote and becoming the largest party, the Conservatives were unable to secure an absolute

majority in Parliament and formed a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. Another significant outcome of these elections was that Labour, although the second largest party in the UK with 29% of the vote, achieved 42% of the vote in Scotland, well ahead of the SNP's 19.9%. This result showed that the SNP had still not been able to transfer the social support it had received in the Scottish parliamentary elections to the general election.

On the other hand, the Tories' ascent to power presented a new opportunity structure for the SNP's referendum project. A Conservative government in Westminster with only one MP from Scotland, reinforced the "democratic deficit" argument, similar to the devolution debates of the 1990s, suggesting that the Tories lacked a mandate to govern Scotland. Moreover, even before the general elections, there were voices within the Conservative Party advocating for accepting the SNP's referendum proposal. They believed that due to the low public support for independence, the SNP would lose the referendum, dealing a significant political blow to the nationalists (MacLeod, 2009).

The new UK coalition government under David Cameron's prime ministry was aware of its vulnerability on the Scottish issue from the outset. To prevent the SNP from gaining more electoral strength and to weaken the "democratic deficit" argument, the Conservatives, unlike Labour, moved swiftly to accelerate the process of "further devolution." Ironically, much like the PP government in 1996 in Madrid, the more centralist Tories adopted a more flexible stance than the pro-devolution Labour. Consequently, the Scotland Bill 2010, published by the government in November, committed itself to implementing the recommendations of the Calman Commission. The bill would give the Scottish Parliament would gain new taxing and borrowing powers. By 2015, it was projected that 35% of the Scottish

administration's budget would come from the Scottish tax system, with the remaining 65% coming from the UK Block Grant. The bill also granted the Scottish Parliament legislative powers in several justice-related policy areas (Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, 2010).

Meanwhile, the focus in Scottish politics shifted to the regional elections scheduled for May 2011. Following its victory in the general elections of May 2010, Labour appeared ahead of the SNP in public opinion polls (Hassan & Shaw, 2012, p. 143). However, as the election campaign commenced in March 2011, the SNP overtook Labour and began to widen the gap in the final month. Throughout the campaign, there was no decisive confrontation between the parties on policy areas. For instance, Labour started to adopt SNP's policies on freezing council tax and providing free university tuition. The defining difference remained the SNP's stance on holding a referendum on independence, a position shared only by the Scottish Greens (Carman et al., 2014, pp. 14-17).

According to public opinion polls, the majority of Scottish voters viewed the SNP's incumbency as competent and positive (Curtice, 2011, p. 61). Even among voters who did not support independence, there was an increasing tendency to vote for the SNP due to its government performance. The SNP highlighted this affirmative perception of its incumbency in its campaign and published its election manifesto under the title "Re-elect the Scottish Government" (SNP, 2011). The SNP's pragmatic, collaborative, and moderate performance had also changed the attitudes of various opponents of secessionism towards the SNP. For instance, The Scottish Sun, Scotland's best-selling newspaper and part of billionaire Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, supported the SNP this time, unlike in 2007.



Figure 8. The Scottish Sun election day headlines in 2007 and 2011

The SNP, with its experienced and ambitious staff, organized the most professional election campaign compared to other parties as well as its own history. With an expenditure of £1,141,662, the SNP spent approximately £300,000 more than Labour on its election campaign. This was a striking difference compared to the £315,776 the SNP spent during the 2010 general elections campaign (Carman et al., 2014, p. 19). Consequently, although a new electoral victory for the SNP was anticipated in the final stages of the campaign, the results on the evening of May 5th were a surprise to everyone, including the SNP leadership (Torrance, 2011, pp. 30-32). At the time, Deputy Leader John Swinney stated that while they expected to win the elections, they did not anticipate securing an absolute majority:

I think the 2011 result was a product of the fact that we had run a very, very successful government in 2007 to 2011. It was a very good, effective, dynamic government. It did bold things in the first place. It survived. So lots of people were a bit surprised, but I think it survived because, frankly, we were a good team and we did well It gave people optimism and hope We set out a bold message to people on the basis of continuing to build on what we'd achieved up until then, and we won an overall majority I certainly didn't expect us to win an overall majority. No. Earlier on in the year, in the start of January 2011, we were well behind in the opinion polls and I was pretty worried about our situation. But it began to get better as we got closer to the election. By the time of the election, I was very confident we

would be the largest party. I had no doubt about that in my mind at all.
(Interview with Swinney, 05.03.2024)

In the May 5 election, the SNP won 69 out of 129 seats, creating not just a surprise but a political earthquake. With 45.4% of the constituency vote, the SNP increased its seat count from constituencies by 32 compared to the 2007 election. These victories were primarily in Labour strongholds but also in regions traditionally held by the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. Given that the SNP's vote has traditionally been dispersed and that in the 1999 and 2003 elections it won seats primarily from regional lists, these results indicated a radical shift. Additionally, besides winning 53 constituency seats, the SNP also gained 16 MSPs from regional lists—a scenario that the Scottish electoral system was specifically designed to prevent (Lynch, 2013, p. 278). The result was a complete upheaval of the Scottish party system.

This was a historic defeat for Scottish Labour. It suffered its worst electoral performance since 1918 (Hassan, 2011). Labour lost its historic heartland, the working-class region of West Scotland, to the SNP. For the first time since the 1930s, Labour lost its position as the leading party in Glasgow. During the election campaign, Labour presented itself as the party best suited to defend the interests of Scottish workers against the ruling Tories (Scottish Labour, 2011). Labour tried to centralize the anti-Tory sentiment, much like it had done in the 2010 general elections, by ignoring the SNP and the Scottish dimension of the elections. However, this tactic failed miserably this time. Even in response to the Tories' social cuts policy, Scottish voters believed that the SNP would make a greater effort than Labour (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Another significant loser in the elections was the Liberal Democrats. Their constituency votes dropped by 8.1%, and their regional list votes fell by 6.1%, reducing their seats from 17 to 5. The Liberal Democrats paid a heavy price in

Scotland for their coalition with the Tories at Westminster. A significant portion of their votes shifted to the SNP, while a smaller fraction went to Labour (Lynch, 2013, p. 278).

On election night, the leaders of all three unionist parties resigned, marking the beginning of a new era in Scottish politics dominated by the SNP. Ironically, however, the historic rise in SNP votes did not correspond with a parallel increase in support for independence. While SNP votes rose to approximately 45%, support for independence remained around 29% (Curtice, 2011, p. 59). Then, how to explain this historic victory of the SNP? According to James Mitchell, the Co-Director of Scottish Election Study in 2011:

The issue of the constitution had declined in importance under the SNP, which is kind of paradoxical, but it declined. But because of this commitment in their manifesto to a referendum, which hardly got mentioned, and with this overall majority, they were in a position where they didn't have much choice but to say, we should have a referendum. And there's no doubt at all that there were people in the SNP who were very nervous about another referendum, about a referendum on independence in 2011, because in our survey the polls suggested they would be very easily defeated, because there'd be no increase in support for independence between 2007, when they first came to power, and 2011, when they won this overall majority. They won because of a perception of competence. By the perception, I think, is because there were very low expectations, but that's a secondary matter. (Interview with Mitchell, 09.03.2024)

As Mitchell underlines, during the 2007-2011 period, the SNP succeeded in proving itself as a competent "governing" party despite being a minority government.

Nevertheless, with the SNP securing an absolute majority in the parliament, Now, it also had to prove itself as an "independence" party and, within a legislative term, convince a significant portion of the Scottish public to support independence.

Moreover, it was still uncertain how the Cameron government would respond to Holyrood's request for an independence referendum.

6.3 Between governance and independence

Until the 2011 election victory, the focus of SNP's leadership was on the process and mechanisms of achieving independence rather than its substance. According to Prof. McEwen, the scholar of Scottish Politics and comparative territorial politics, the prospect of holding a referendum "forced the SNP for the first time to spell out what independence really means":

There had been some earlier documents about the process, but nothing as detailed as what they had to consider when it could have been a reality. And before, the earlier things were when it was just a political party. Here they had the Office, the resources of the bureaucracy, government to help them do that" (Interview with Nicola McEwen, 12.02.2024).

The SNP's election manifesto promised to hold an independence referendum within a legislative term. Therefore, the SNP potentially had a five-year timeframe to work with. The party needed this time to both increase public support and clarify its independence strategy. "We had to do a lot of work building the independence case, which hadn't been done because we've been spending our time focusing on winning government" (Interview with Stephen Noon, 19.02.2024).

The election results were also a big surprise and challenge for the UK government. Following Cameron's congratulations to the SNP for their "emphatic win" ("Scottish election: Salmond victorious", 2011), the UK government had to develop a strategy to address the SNP's demand for an independence referendum and the future territorial status of Scotland. Among the Conservatives, the champions of unionism, there was a notable faction that believed the government should completely dismiss the referendum demand. However, Cameron mentions in his autobiography that he was fully aware of the need to manage this process with great care and sensitivity:

If it [SNP] won a majority, it would claim a democratic mandate to hold that referendum. The UK government would therefore have a decision to make,

since the power to hold a referendum was reserved, and so would need agreement from Westminster. There was the option of making a referendum non-binding, or of denying it altogether. Many people wanted this. After all, a referendum was a massive gamble. ... While I could understand the desire to avoid a referendum, I thought it would be a much bigger gamble to thwart it. The sense of grievance against a distant, out-of-touch Westminster government would only grow. That would be the fuel the SNP needed to turn an unlikely vote for independence - in 2012 only about 35 per cent of Scots were saying they would vote Yes - into a near-certainty. (Cameron, 2020, p. 315)

Indeed, according to the mainstream legal opinion, the authority to hold a referendum reserved to Westminster. Among the powers reserved for Westminster under the Scotland Act 1998 were constitutional matters and the union between Scotland and England (Leyland, 2021, p. 241). However, there were also constitutional scholars who argued that with the right formulation, the Scottish Parliament could hold a referendum³⁵. Nonetheless, the issue of the referendum's constitutionality did not become a dominant debate during this period, unlike in Spain, due to the UK government's willingness to negotiate with the SNP administration.³⁶

While the SNP aimed to extend the referendum process over the longest possible timeframe to achieve victory, the opposite was true for the UK government. Cameron, who believed that allowing a referendum would be more beneficial for maintaining the UK's unity than blocking it, thought the referendum should be held swiftly while public support was still in favor of unity. He emphasized that the process should be "fair, legal, and decisive":

The issue of a referendum was unavoidable. People had voted for it; we would deliver it. We would fight to keep the UK together, and we would have

³⁵ SNP's constitutional advisor, Prof. MacCormick, argued that it was possible to hold a referendum with the question, "Do you advise and consent to the Executive opening conversations with the United Kingdom government to agree terms for Scottish independence on the basis of the constitution envisaged, or on such other basis as the people, by then, choose to put in place?" (MacCormick, 2000, p. 726; cited in Lynch, 2013, p 283).

³⁶ However, following Brexit and the SNP's demand for a second independence referendum, this debate would take on a political nature similar to that in Spain.

to do it soon - within the Parliament. There was a feeling that the SNP wanted to put it off as long as possible in order to gain maximum support. I wanted to deny them that advantage. We would also have to make sure that the whole process was fair, legal and decisive. Any hint that it was not would be an open goal for the SNP to deny its validity. And above all, it would have to be a single question: Scotland in the UK or out of it. (Cameron, 2020, p. 316)

Nevertheless, neither side rushed to make the first move. Following the May elections, both parties engaged in intensive preparations to devise the right strategy and actions. After this period of preparation, the UK government made the first move by publishing a consultation on January 10, 2012, announced by Secretary of State for Scotland Michael Moore during his presentation in the House of Commons (Scotland's Constitutional Future, 2012). Fifteen days later, the Scottish government responded by releasing its own consultation document (Scottish Government, 2012).

The core debate between the UK government and the Scottish government revolved around the formulation of the referendum question and the timing. The UK government advocated for a straightforward "yes or no" question regarding independence, while the SNP preferred a wording that included devo-max. Additionally, while the SNP wanted to extend the referendum process over a longer period, the UK government demanded a swift resolution. Another point of contention was the SNP's proposal to lower the voting age to 16.

As the consultation documents from both governments began to be publicly debated, the first meeting between Cameron and Salmond took place in February 2012 in Edinburgh. This meeting was just the beginning of a tough negotiation process. The most critical point of the negotiations was the formulation of the referendum question. Cameron, having decided to take a "gamble" by agreeing to the referendum, was determined not to back down on excluding the devo-max option. Moreover, he suspected that the SNP's referendum policy might be a mere bluff:

We had a suspicion that the SNP didn't really want a proper independence referendum at all. They thought it might be lost, and were actually happy to carry on governing and to keep the grievance. What they might do was insist upon a second question on the ballot, offering far greater devolution - an attractive option to those nervous about independence. A vote for it would mean the nationalists could chalk up the result as a victory, as progress, and use it to pave the way for a referendum on total independence - which would be easier to win - at a later date. (Cameron, 2020, pp. 317-8)

The multi-optional referendum was an option that the SNP had kept on the table since the National Conversation process. As previously mentioned, in the document “Your Scotland, Your Voice”, the SNP leadership evaluated different options of further devolution and independence, and elaborated on the devo-max option.

According to this:

Under full devolution the existing devolution framework would be retained, and Scotland would remain within the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom Government and institutions would continue to have responsibility for many matters, for example the currency and monetary policy, and decisions on peace and war. Full devolution would give Scotland more responsibility for domestic matters, and would extend the range of measures the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament could take to encourage greater sustainable economic growth. (SNP Government, 2009, p. 17)

The devo-max policy was part of the SNP's gradualist strategy. The SNP leadership did not see any contradiction in putting different constitutional options to a referendum. Stephen Noon explains that "Having a multi-option referendum meant that you increased the number of people who are arguing for a large part of your case":

On the back of like an energetic support for devo-max, people might then say, "well actually we may as well just go for the whole thing". So that was the logic. I think that's the correct logic. I think that again, the strategy for the movement should be identifying where we have got our maximum alliance. So if there's a 60% of people in Scotland believe we should be more economically independent, we should be absolutely allying with them because they take us one step further towards full independence. I don't believe in this idea that you get it all at once, so you should go where the support is. (Interview with Noon, 19.02.2024)

Within the SNP leadership, there was a consensus on a two-question multi-option referendum, although opinions varied on the potential outcomes. For example, John Swinney that believed the devo-max option would prevail, while Kenny MacAskill, who was then Cabinet Secretary for Justice in the Scottish Government at the time and a prominent SNP leader, thought the devo-max option would remain in the minority, in such a scenario. However, another consensus within the SNP direction was that Cameron's refusal to accept a multi-option referendum was based on his belief that it would lead to a decisive defeat for the SNP in a single-question referendum on independence (Interview with Kenny MacAskill, 08.03.2024).

On the other hand, in the consultation document, the SNP government formulated the possible ballot question as a single query: "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?" Aware that the UK government would not back down on this issue, the SNP did not want keeping the devo-max option on the table to be perceived as a sign of weakness. Ironically, however, while support for devo-max was around 60% according to polls, during the consultation process where over 20,000 people submitted their views, 62% of respondents opposed having a second question on the ballot (Griesbach et al., 2012, p. 26).

As the Scottish Government's consultation process drew to a close, the Scotland Bill 2010, prepared by the UK Government based on the Calman Commission's report, received Royal Assent on May 1, becoming the Scotland Act 2012. This marked the conclusion of the reform process initiated by the commission established in the Scottish Parliament, with "the single biggest devolution of financial powers since 1707" (HM Government, 2013). However, the political dynamics in Scotland had shifted so significantly during this period that the enactment of this "historical" reform did not attract much public attention.

As negotiations between the central and regional governments over the referendum process continued, campaign platforms for both the "Yes" and "No" sides were also established. The Yes Scotland platform, was announced on May 25, 2012, by the SNP, Scottish Greens, and SSP. On June 25, the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats launched the Better Together platform in support of the "No" option. Progress in the negotiations over the form and content of the referendum only began to be made towards the end of summer. By October, mutual concessions had led to an agreement on all details. On October 15, 2012, in Edinburgh, Alex Salmond and David Cameron publicly signed the document known as the Edinburgh Agreement, officially titled "Agreement between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government on a referendum on independence for Scotland."

The Agreement devolved powers over the legislation and organization of the referendum process to the Scottish Parliament. This devolution took the form of an Order in Council promoted under Section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998. As part of the Agreement, the Scottish Government accepted that the referendum would contain a single question and not devo-max option. In return, the UK government allowed the Scottish Parliament to determine the wording of the question, approved voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds, and agreed to hold the referendum by the end of 2014. Cameron later noted in his memoirs that he considered the agreement a success for their side:

People would argue that I gave too much away to get that single question. That with votes for the young, a long campaign and the positivity of a Yes vote, it was 3-1 to Salmond. But there was more to my concessions. I was determined to win the battle of perceptions as to whether the referendum was genuinely 'made in Scotland.' I knew that if there was the merest hint of unfairness or sense that it was a Westminster stitch-up, Salmond would exploit it mercilessly. We needed it to have a force and legitimacy that could be used in future arguments against calls for a Scottish referendum. (Cameron, 2020, p. 319)

Once the agreement was signed, there was no turning back for the SNP. For the first time, the party's *raison d'être* -independence- became a concrete and possible option. However, the party faced the formidable task of increasing public support for independence from around 30% to 50% within the two-year timeframe. Alex Salmond, who had immense confidence in his abilities and leadership capacity, was eager to take on this challenge. Following the extraordinary election victory in 2011, the SNP leadership was also hopeful they could achieve another historic triumph. In fact, the Yes campaign had already begun its activities before the agreement, and the SNP had been diligently working to build a grassroots movement.

During the campaign, the SNP faced a significant dilemma. On one hand, they needed to persuade low-income, impoverished communities, and young people—those generally distrustful of politicians and who had not previously voted—to support the case for independence and turn out in the hope of real change. On the other hand, they had to win over, or at least neutralize, segments of the population open to the idea of independence but concerned about potential turmoil, such as retirees worried about their pensions and middle-class individuals anxious about rising mortgage rates and living costs. To attract the former group, the SNP needed to radicalize the content of independence, while for the latter, they needed to moderate it. With this difficult balance in mind, the SNP worked to outline its roadmap to independence and, for the first time, had to explain in detail what independence would entail.

6.4 Independence as the highest stage of gradualism

As outlined in Chapter 4, the most significant debates within the SNP regarding the substance of independence took place in the first half of the 1980s. After the 1979

defeat, the party sought a new direction, leading to conferences that focused on positions related to the European Community, devolution, and NATO. During this period, the SNP shifted its negative stance on the European Community, adopting a pro-European position with the slogan "Independence in Europe." It was also during this time that a conference resolution was passed in support of devolution and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. However, the traditional stance of rejecting NATO was reaffirmed.

Nevertheless, with the referendum now on the table, the debate over the SNP's stance on NATO has reopened. The presence of the UK's Trident nuclear weapons in Scotland had fostered a significant anti-nuclear, anti-NATO sentiment among the Scottish public, with widespread support for the removal of these nuclear weapons from Scotland (Foley & Ramand, 2014). This political mood resonated with the SNP's anti-NATO stance. However, the SNP leadership began advocating for an independent Scotland to be part of NATO to make independence a more "credible option". They proposed that an independent Scotland could be a NATO member while still removing Trident nuclear missiles from its territory ("Independent Scotland could join NATO", 2012). In the White Paper, both the traditional anti-nuclear stance and the revised pro-NATO position were expressed as follows:

Following a vote for independence, we would make early agreement on the speediest safe removal of nuclear weapons a priority ... [T]he Scottish Government will notify NATO of our intention to join the alliance and will negotiate our transition from being a NATO member as part of the UK to becoming an independent member of the alliance. Scotland would take our place as one of the many non-nuclear members of NATO. (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 14)

Another major topic of discussion during this period was the question of currency. What currency would an independent Scotland use? The SNP had long argued that an independent Scotland should have its own central bank and currency. This stance was

first revised in 1997 in favor of joining the European Monetary Union. Until the Great Recession and the euro crisis, the SNP maintained its policy of joining the eurozone. From 2009 onward, the SNP began to suggest that sterling could be used for a certain period following independence. Throughout 2013, reports and statements from the Scottish Government repeatedly expressed the desire to maintain a currency union with the UK (Brown Swan & Petershohn, 2017, p. 71). This position was confirmed in the White Paper published in November 2013: “Using Sterling will provide continuity and certainty for business and individuals, and an independent Scotland will make a substantial contribution to a Sterling Area. We will therefore retain the pound in an independent Scotland.” (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 7). This stance of the SNP would become one of the most controversial topics during the referendum campaign.

Along with the currency issue, the SNP also stated that the head of the new Scottish state would continue to be the UK monarchy (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 22). During the campaign, Alex Salmond frequently mentioned that there were currently six unions between Scotland and the rest of the UK. In the event of Scotland's independence, only the political union would be dissolved. This dissolution would overcome “the democratic deficit which sees policies like the punitive bedroom tax, the renewal of Trident or Royal Mail privatisation imposed on Scotland against the wishes of Scotland's democratically elected representatives” (Salmond, cited in the Herald, 2013). In this framework, independence meant that the Scottish government would gain competence in various policy areas. However, the SNP's position was to maintain union in other key strategic areas:

An independent Scotland would continue to be in five of these unions: the EU, a currency union, the Union of the Crowns allowing the Queen to remain the monarch of Scotland, a defence union through membership of NATO, and a social union between the people of the UK ... We will embrace those other

unions while using the powers of independence to renew and improve them. (Salmond, cited in the Herald, 2013).

Framing independence in this manner was the logical conclusion of the SNP's gradualist strategy. The SNP did not present independence as a radical alternative; instead, it was "just a little bit more than devo-max" (Interview with McEwen, 12.02.2024). For the SNP leadership, independence was not a rupture from the old order but rather the natural evolution and highest stage of home rule. Scholars have identified this version of secessionism as "independence lite" (Keating, 2012) or "embedded independence" (Brown Swan & McEwen, 2021), while political opponents of the SNP referred to it as "indy-lite" (Foley & Ramand, 2014).

Another aspect revealing the limits of rupture was the politics implemented by the British State following the Edinburgh Agreement. In addition to the Better Together parties, state apparatuses as a whole—from the monarchy to BBC commentators—were mobilized for the "defense of the union" (Foley et al., 2022). In the next section, I will analyze the unionist campaign by the center within this framework.

6.5 "The empire strikes back": From project fear to devo-max

As emphasized above, the reason the Cameron administration allowed the independence referendum was not due to any abstract democratic ideals, indifference to Scotland leaving the UK, or being compelled to do so, but rather the belief that the independence option would face a crushing defeat in such a referendum. In this way, they hoped that the debate over independence would be off the agenda for a long time and that the SNP would suffer a historic defeat. In this context, Better Together, the platform of the three parties defending the unity of the UK, ran a strong campaign advocating for a No vote.

The Better Together campaign was managed organizationally by Labour and financially by the Conservatives (Cameron, 2020, p. 548). As one Labour member put it, “So the money came from the Conservative side, but the people came from Labour” (Author Interview, 14.03.2024). Due to the unpopularity of the Conservatives in Scotland, the main spokesperson for the campaign was not from the governing parties but Labour's former finance minister, Alistair Darling. Darling stated that the campaign's goal was not just to win but to achieve a decisive victory that would definitively eliminate the possibility of a new independence referendum process—a “neverendum” (Devlin, 2013).

At the beginning of the campaign, the No side, which was in a very advantageous position, came to two key conclusions from its research to guarantee victory: “All the polling showed that most typical Labour voters could break either way. And it also showed that the issues they were most concerned about were economic issues like the currency and general living standards” (Author Interview with Kezia Dugdale, 11.03.2024). Based on these findings, the Better Together campaign decided to focus on winning over undecided Labour voters and to emphasize economic issues in this effort.

The campaign organizers highlighted the economic issue by stoking concerns about the uncertainties that independence would create. They pointed out that the economic upheavals of independence could lead to situations like pension payments not being made or mortgage rates increasing. Rob Shourthouse, the campaign's communications director, jokingly referred to this strategy as “Project Fear” at a Tory conference (Gordon, 2014a). Shourthouse's ironic remark actually captured the essence of the message the Better Together campaign aimed to convey, and after this speech was leaked, the term “Project Fear” began to be widely used in

the public discourse, particularly by the Yes campaigners, to refer to the Better Together campaign (Pike, 2016).

One of the principal topics of Project Fear was the currency issue. As mentioned above, the SNP planned for an independent Scotland to continue using the pound sterling. According to the unionist camp, this was the weakest aspect of the Yes Campaign. Therefore, both the UK government and representatives of the Better Together campaign consistently emphasized that Scotland could not remain in a monetary union with the UK in the event of independence (HM Treasury, 2014). In February 2014, George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the Con-Dem government, personally stated in Edinburgh that the government categorically rejected a currency union with an independent Scotland: "If Scotland walks away from the UK, it walks away from the pound" (Settle, 2014). Furthermore, Alistair Darling, as the principal spokesperson for Better Together, throughout the campaign criticized the SNP government for not having a Plan B for Scotland's currency despite the fact that it would not be able to use the pound sterling, and argued that this would put the payment of pensions and public sector salaries at great risk (Darling, 2014). Although SNP representatives argued that it was possible for a state to unilaterally peg its currency to that of another state, citing examples such as Denmark and other countries, the currency issue was one of the topics that created the most uncertainty among the Scottish public (Liñeira et al., 2017).

Another key topic that Better Together raised in this context was the oil issue. Oil reserves were undoubtedly of great importance to the Scottish economy. Since the "It's Scotland's Oil" campaign of the early 1970s, the use of oil revenues had always been a prominent issue for the SNP. According to the SNP's calculations:

Since 1976/77, the UK Government has raised approximately £155 billion in direct tax revenue from oil and gas production. Adjusted for inflation, this is

equivalent to £269 billion (2008 prices); or approximately eight times the annual Scottish Government Budget. These revenues have gone directly into the UK Exchequer, with successive governments using the windfall to fund public spending and to seek to reduce taxation across the UK (Scottish Government, 2009, p. 19).

It was clear that, in the event of independence, oil and gas revenues would become a tremendous economic resource for Scotland. However, oil and gas extraction from the North Sea had been declining since the late 1990s (HM Government, 2014a, p. 60), and various studies indicated that North Sea oil reserves were significantly depleted, with the extraction process in this area having little time left. The Better Together platform made this issue one of its main priorities throughout the campaign, arguing that an independent Scotland could not rely on oil revenues (Pike, 2016). Moreover, the central government stated that, in the event of Scottish independence, the UK would seek compensation for its current investments and refrain from making new investments, hence claiming that the contribution of oil reserves to the Scottish economy would be quite limited (HM Government, 2014a). While the SNP argued that the Scottish economy was not dependent on oil and gas, describing them as a bonus (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 31), Better Together's propaganda around oil resources became an effective campaign in raising economic concerns.

Apart from economic issues, another aspect of Project Fear related to international politics. The unionist camp declared that an independent Scotland's membership in the EU and NATO would not happen automatically and that, as a newly established country, Scotland would need the approval of all member countries, including the UK, to join these international organizations (HM Government, 2014b). A particularly critical topic in this area was the Trident program, under which the UK's and NATO's nuclear weapons were located at the Clyde naval base in western Scotland. In the event of independence, the SNP

promised to exit the Trident program and rid the country of nuclear weapons. In this scenario, relocating the UK's nuclear weapons would take years and cost billions of pounds (HM Government, 2014b, p. 11). Such a situation would, in practice, mean that the UK would cease to be a nuclear power for a certain period. In this scenario, there were discussions suggesting that even the UK's permanent membership in the UN Security Council could be questioned (Foley & Ramand, 2014, p. 22). Therefore, this issue held strategic importance for both the UK and NATO, and the UK government implied that it could block Scotland's entry into international organizations if an independent Scotland withdrew from Trident.

Until shortly before the end of the referendum campaign, Project Fear remained the core strategy of Better Together. However, as we will see in detail in the next chapter, about a month before the referendum, public opinion polls began to show a shift, disrupting the long-stable advantage in favor of No. When the campaign platforms were established in the spring of 2012, the Yes vote stood at around 30%, rising to 40% by the fall of 2012, and remaining at that level for a considerable time. However, about a month before the referendum, a rising trend in Yes votes began to be observed in polls, and two weeks before the referendum, some polls showed Yes surpassing No. This unexpected situation sounded alarm bells in the unionist camp: "For people to vote No, it wouldn't be enough to contrast the risk with the status quo. We would have to offer something more." (Cameron, 2020, p. 552)

Better Together's new strategy was the promise that, in the event of a No vote, more powers would be devolved to Scotland. Gordon Brown, the former Labour prime minister who still wields considerable influence over Scottish politics, stepped up to the plate, in coordination with Cameron, to try to halt the rise of the

Yes vote. In the final weeks of the campaign, Brown made numerous speeches in Scotland, assuring that further devolution would be swiftly enacted if the vote was No. (Brown, 2018; “Gordon Brown’s speech”, 2014)

To make this promise more impactful, just two days before the referendum, an announcement titled "The Vow" was published in the

Daily Record newspaper, signed by the three leaders of the Better Together parties. This announcement promised that Scotland would be granted extensive powers within the framework of fiscal sovereignty, that the management of the NHS would be under the Scottish government, and that these arrangements would be implemented swiftly.

With this new move made in a panic by the Better Together parties just days before the referendum, a rather ironic picture emerged. As discussed above, at the start of the referendum debates, the SNP demanded that the option of "Devo-Max" be included on the ballot, while the Cameron administration was willing to make many concessions to prevent this option from being included. However, "The Vow" declaration essentially turned the No vote into a form of "Devo-Max." In the previous section, I mentioned how the SNP framed independence as "just a little bit



Figure 9. Daily Record's historical front page of 16 September 2014

more than Devo-Max." Better Together's promise, on the other hand, made the continuation of the union "just a little bit less than Devo-Max." Thus, the options voted on in the referendum became increasingly converged between a kind of "Devo-Max" versus "Indy-Lite." In this way, the limits of rupture were defined not only by the SNP moderating independence but also by the unionists reformulating the No vote.

6.6 Conclusion

In the United Kingdom, a "union state," constitutional politics provided two decisive opportunity structures for the rise of Scottish political nationalism. The first was the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, and the second was the bilateral, binding independence referendum. Labour with its devolution policy first, and then the Conservatives with its referendum policy hoped to deal a historic blow to the SNP. This chapter examined in detail how, contrary to Labour's expectations, devolution made the SNP much stronger, while the Conservatives' referendum policy opened the door to a process that brought support for independence from 30% to almost 50%. As a result, the SNP was able to successfully navigate both of these challenges.

In the UK, which lacks a codified constitution and where the multinational character of the state is acknowledged by the center, negotiations between the center and the periphery gave actors a wide room for maneuver. However, this process also revealed that such constitutional flexibility would not always work in favor of the

periphery, as the limits of constitutional politics are determined by the UK government and conjunctural balance of power in the center.³⁷

The SNP, which gained the mandate to organize the independence referendum through the Edinburgh Agreement, has always been a vague "self-government" party since its inception. Although this concept gradually became more clearly defined as "independence," its substance was never thoroughly detailed (Brown Swan & McEwen, 2021). The primary historical divide within the SNP has centered not so much on the content of independence but on the strategy for achieving it, with gradualist and fundamentalist factions at odds. This divide, however, became less prominent in the 1990s under Salmond's leadership, as the gradualists gained definitive dominance.

This gradualist strategy was put to the test in two key moments. The first was in 1997, when the SNP had to decide its stance on Labour's devolution proposal. Unlike the debates of the 1970s, the SNP overwhelmingly supported devolution this time. The second major test was what direction to take after the establishment of a devolved parliament. As an "independence" party, what policies would the SNP pursue on conjunctural issues? This question was particularly important for the SNP because, unlike CDC, it had never been an influential force in the state-wide parliament (except during the 1974-79 period). For the SNP, the Scottish Parliament represented a historic opportunity structure to emerge from marginality and play a significant role on the political scene. Instead of being a maximalist "independence" party in the Scottish parliament, the SNP set itself the strategy of becoming a gradualist "governing" party. A crucial component of this "governing" strategy was

³⁷ Although it falls outside the time frame covered by this study, one of the manifestations of this dynamic was the central government's refusal to grant the Scottish government's demand for a second referendum after Brexit.

the proposal for a referendum. Voting for the SNP would not automatically signify support for independence; instead, the SNP promised to hold a referendum on independence if they came to power. Gradualism thus won both tests.

At a superficial glance, the first eight years of devolution seemed to align with Labour's expectation that it would "kill nationalism stone dead". However, Labour squandered this period of power, in terms of government performance, which, although not leading to immediate independence, set the stage for the SNP's historic rise. After overcoming its interregnum, the SNP narrowly emerged as the leading party in the 2007 elections and maintained a minority government for four years, fundamentally changing the balance of Scottish politics. Unlike Labour, the SNP successfully projected an image of a competent and effective government, demonstrating that it could achieve its initial goal of becoming a "governing party."

The SNP's overwhelming victory in the 2011 election was not due to increasing support for independence among Scottish voters but rather to the SNP's strong "governing" performance (Johns et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the SNP's absolute majority in parliament meant there were no longer any obstacles to holding an independence referendum. Faced with only 30% public support for independence, the SNP envisioned a prolonged referendum campaign and advocated for a multi-optional referendum that included the option of devo-max.

With the Cameron administration, confident of a decisive victory in a single-question referendum, firmly rejecting the multi-optional option, the SNP devoted all its energy to promoting the independence option and, for the first time, detailing the full content of what independence would entail. The 650-page White Paper published by the Scottish Government in November 2013 comprehensively outlined the SNP's vision for independence.

The way the SNP framed independence also called into question the limits of rupture from the UK. The SNP did not present independence as a radical break but rather as a moderate and soft transition. Accordingly, in October 2012, it first changed its stance on NATO. It also advocated for the continuation of the union with the UK regarding currency and the head of state. Thus, as the decision moment approached, the SNP began to develop a blurry strategy to increase its maneuverability.

The Better Together campaign, confident in its victory from the outset, ran the referendum campaign with a strategy emphasizing the risks of independence, known as Project Fear. While this strategy seemed to be effective for a time, the rise in Yes votes about a month before the referendum threatened the outcome, prompting the unionist parties to propose a promise close to Devo-Max, thus changing the substance of the No vote. As a result, the options presented in the referendum became "moderated" independence and "empowered" autonomy.

In the Catalan case, the breakdown in bargaining with the center, and in Scotland, the "increased opportunity structures" in constitutional politics, shaped the necessary conditions for the rise of secessionism. However, additional factors were required to make these conditions to become "sufficient". One such factor was the impact of the Great Recession and the intertwining of the economic case with the territorial case. As we will explore in the next chapter, although it took different forms in Catalonia and Scotland, the economic case was central to the independence debate in both cases.

CHAPTER 7

MAKING THE ECONOMIC ARGUMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

“Given the appropriate catalyst, identity can always be utilized as a base for regional mobilization.”
Rokkan and Urwin, 1982

What role did the economy play in the radicalization of the strategies of the stateless nationalist parties under examination? Was the Great Recession a critical juncture for the rise of secessionism and referendum attempts? How did the secessionist governing parties converge the territorial and socio-economic dimensions within their political agendas and during their incumbency? This chapter will examine the impact of the economic dimension on the territorial strategies of the CDC and SNP.

In the next sections, I will first address the socio-economic consequences of the Great Recession and its political impact in both the center and the periphery; the crash that began as a financial crisis in 2008 but quickly turned into a socio-economic crisis. Second, I will examine the effects of austerity politics in the periphery and the economic strategies and policies implemented by the CDC and SNP during the crisis. I will explore how these two parties converged the economic and territorial dimensions before the referendum. Then, I will analyze the radicalization of the masses and the popular mobilizations that rose with either economic or nationalist demands.

7.1 The Great Recession that shook the world

We already have a rich body of literature on the socio-economic consequences of the Great Recession (Blyth, 2013; Stuckler and Basu, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012). We know that the government bailout packages designed to rescue failing banks and companies massively increased public debt, and in response, governments implemented

austerity policies. These austerity measures, in turn, transformed the financial crisis into a broader socio-economic crisis. We also know that this socio-economic crisis led to widespread public discontent, triggering both a crisis in party systems and a wave of social mobilizations (della Porta, 2015). Scholars have thus identified the Great Recession as a critical juncture (Kriesi, 2019), or a key element of "turbulent times" (Rovny & Whitefield, 2019), or a central component of a "spiral crisis" (della Porta et al., 2020).

Despite the crisis originating in the United States, we know that it had even more profound effects in Europe (Lapavitsas et al., 2012; Stiglitz, 2016). During what became known as the "Eurozone crisis," numerous governments across Europe lost elections due to punishment votes (Kriesi, 2014; Bojar et al., 2022), traditional mainstream parties eroded, and outsider, new political parties surged in popularity (Bremer et al., 2020; Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2017; Mudde, 2014). In this context, the UK, one of the main hubs of the global financial network (Norfield, 2016), and Spain, which like the US had based its economic growth in the 2000s on risky financial expansion in the construction and real estate sector (Carreras & Tafunell, 2021), were among the countries most affected by the socio-economic and political consequences of the Great Recession.

The financial collapse, with its initial signs appearing in 2007, became a stark and severe reality by late 2008. Between 2008 and 2013, Spain's average growth rate was -1.31%, while the UK's was 0.31%³⁸. Youth unemployment in Spain skyrocketed from 17.5% in January 2007 to 55.4% in January 2013, while in the UK, it jumped from 12.3% to 19.4% during the same period. In both countries, governments announced bailout packages worth hundreds of billions of dollars to rescue the

³⁸ During this period, the global growth rate averaged 2.35% (World Bank, 2024).

banking sector. During this time, Spain's public debt rose from 35.8% to 100.5%, and the UK's from 35.6% to 79.2% (World Bank, 2024). As budgetary resources were injected into failing banks and corporations, governments implemented austerity policies that dealt a heavy blow to social welfare programs. Wage increases were temporarily frozen, and significant cuts were made to budgets for education, health, and social services (Gray, 2020; Foley, 2024).

Due to the UK's higher dependency on US banks, the financial crisis hit the UK and Scotland earlier than it did Spain and Catalonia. Moreover, the crisis began in a particularly traumatic manner for Scotland. The country's two largest banks, the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Halifax Bank of Scotland (HBOS), were among the first to collapse in the UK. Both banks were nationalized by the Labour government and rescued using funds from all UK taxpayers. The collapse of RBS was especially significant, as just before the crisis, it had become the world's largest company by assets, valued at £1.9 trillion, and the fifth-largest bank globally by stock market value. The £50 billion bailout that led to its nationalization was one of the largest rescue operations in the world (Fraser, 2014).

Appointed CEO in 2000, Fred Goodwin's aggressive growth strategy rapidly transformed RBS into one of the world's largest banks. Headquartered in Edinburgh, RBS CEO Goodwin was considered Scotland's "most powerful man" during the 2000s. The risky decisions that would eventually lead to the bank's collapse were at the time viewed as major successes, and in 2004, the Labour government awarded him a knighthood. The idea of linking the words "collapse" and "RBS" was unthinkable at that time. The honor of being the first to prophetically and ironically suggest that RBS might be nationalized goes to Colin Fox, an Edinburgh MSP from the Scottish Socialist Party. Fox recounts the story as follows:

When I was a member of the parliament, I remember having a meeting with a chief executive officer of the Royal Bank of Scotland. He was very arrogant, too confident. The MSPs were there and he was making his presentation. And if you've been to these meetings, you know how it works. A socialist, you're never going to get to ask a question, they just block you out of it. So unless you get in first, you're done for. So as soon as he finished, a guy goes, "any questions"? I said "I've got a question". And I asked: What would you say if I told you that the Scottish Socialist Party intends to nationalize the Royal Bank of Scotland? This is in 2003, right? And he looked around the room at all the other MSPs, not me... He just looked around the rest of them and he said, "I don't think that's going to happen." So you roll forward five years and the Royal Bank of Scotland was nationalized because it was burst. (Author Interview with Colin Fox, 12.03.2024)

On the other hand, despite having "Scotland" in their names and being headquartered in Edinburgh, just how "Scottish" were these banks? When the crisis hit, only one-sixth of RBS's employees were based in Scotland, with the majority of its operations occurring in the rest of the UK and other countries (Foley, 2024, p. 127). At the same time, the primary shareholders were not the indigenous "Scottish" bourgeoisie but rather multinational corporations. Nevertheless, for many in Scotland, the bailout of RBS by UK taxpayers was a dramatic turn of events, especially since RBS had become a source of national pride (Cook, 2014). Another significant and dramatic impact of the crisis on Scotland was the rapid collapse of the Irish and Icelandic economies. Up until that point, SNP leaders, particularly First Minister Alex Salmond, had praised the economic models of these "Celtic Tigers," which relied on low corporate taxes and financial deregulation, and held them up as a reference for Scotland³⁹. The collapse of these economies marked the end of that narrative.

Although the crisis reached Spain later than the UK, it was far more devastating. Moreover, in Catalonia, where economic growth was more dependent on real estate, construction, and financial sectors compared to the rest of Spain, the impact of the crisis was even more severe (Ghemawat & Vives, 2009). The economic

³⁹ Salmond gave one of his famous speeches on this topic at Harvard University in March 2008, just before the onset of the crisis. (Salmond, 2008)

contraction and rise in unemployment in Catalonia surpassed the statewide levels (Subirats, 2014). Another significant consequence of the economic crisis in Catalonia was the massive increase in regional government debt. With the onset of the crisis, the Generalitat's revenues dried up, and its debt skyrocketed⁴⁰. By the second half of 2010, the Catalan government reached a point where it could no longer service its debt through market-based loans. During this period, the Generalitat resorted to extraordinary measures such as borrowing from individuals at relatively high interest rates through the retail debt instrument called "patriotic bonds", while the central government initiated the first credit support to autonomous communities and bank bailouts (Del Pino & Ramos, 2018; Ricomá & Muñoz, 2013).

The crisis came under center-left governments in both countries. Social democratic governments were the first to introduce austerity programs with bailouts for banks and companies. Following the crisis, both the PSOE and Labour lost power to their main rivals, the center-right parties, in the first general elections. In the UK, a coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats (Con-Dem) was formed after the 2010 general elections in a country where coalitions are rare, while in Spain, the PP secured an absolute majority in parliament in the snap elections in 2011. On the other hand, in terms of austerity policies, the new governments continued the policies inherited from their center-left successors, partly deepening them. The center-left parties, once in opposition, did not object these policies either. Consequently, there was a consensus among the mainstream statewide parties in both countries on the economic policies to be pursued in response to the crisis.

⁴⁰ The Generalitat's tax revenues linked to the real estate sector fell sharply, dropping from €3.02 billion in 2007 to €1.64 billion in 2008 and further to €1.30 billion in 2009, where they remained in the following years. Meanwhile, the Generalitat's debt to GDP ratio rose from 0.6% in 2007 to 2.3% in 2009 (See Carreras et al., 2018, pp. 32-34).

The reflection of the crisis in the political sphere was not immediate. Initially, voters punished incumbent parties, bringing alternative mainstream parties to power. However, the consensus among traditional mainstream parties and the realization that there would be no short-term exit from the economic crisis and austerity policies soon shook the political establishment in both countries to its core. In Spain, following the emergence of the 15-M social movement in 2011, Podemos and Ciudadanos rose as viable alternatives to the two-party system, plunging the country into its most significant governance crisis since the post-Franco era with the 2015 general elections (Orriols & Cordero, 2016). In the UK, the anti-EU and anti-immigrant United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was on the rise, while Labour experienced a leftward renewal under the leadership of Corbyn in 2015 (Kogan, 2019). Tories, in competition with UKIP, took the lead in pushing for Brexit. Additionally, the SNP became a formidable force in Westminster, winning nearly all the seats in Scotland in the 2015 general election. Widespread popular discontent fueled by the economic crisis and austerity policies played a significant role in these political upheavals.

7.2 Framing the crisis in the periphery

“The most important aspect of recessions and changing economic conditions for nationalist movements is most likely the political and policy reaction of central governments.”

Béland & Lecours, 2019

The changes in central governments led to distinct dynamics in Scotland and Catalonia. In the UK, the formation of the Con-Dem coalition government opened new windows of opportunity for the SNP to push for independence. In contrast, in Spain, the absolute majority government of the PP significantly constrained CDC's

ability to maneuver. Nevertheless, in both cases, the combination of central government shifts and austerity measures acted as a catalyst for radicalization.

The shift in power at Westminster had two significant positive outcomes for the SNP. The first, as discussed in Chapter 6, was the formation of a government led by Tories, a party that had received very low support in Scotland. The SNP framed this development as a reemergence of the "democratic deficit" and intensified its rhetoric that the only real solution to "protect Scotland from Tory cuts" (SNP, 2011, p. 28) was independence. The second important outcome was the "Westminster consensus" on austerity that formed between the Con-Dem coalition and Labour (Foley, 2024, p. 128). This allowed the SNP to position itself as the sole representative of anti-austerity politics in Scotland, where such sentiment was particularly strong. In the wake of disillusionment with 13-year Labour government and frustration over the return of the Tories to power, this rhetoric proved highly effective for the SNP, helping it to make significant inroads into the traditional Labour heartlands.

According to Michael Keating, the eminent professor of Scottish politics, "support for Scottish self-government historically goes up in good times, not in bad times." He attributes the improvement in Scotland's economy, and the self-confidence that comes with it, to the rise in support for the SNP and self-governance:

In the 1970s, Scotland was relatively well on. '70s were relatively optimistic in support for nationalism. About the '80s it went down. Stories about the 1970 being a terrible time are not true. They were at the 1980s. Before the First World War the support was very high. In the '30s it went down, '40s it went up very well. And over the last 50 years, Scotland's position relatively to the UK has improved. So now it's no longer a poor party of the country. GDP per capita is almost equal to the UK average. The only places better off than Scotland, London and Southeast, and all the English regions are worse. So that sense that Scotland is relatively well I think explains the self-confidence in Scotland. A lot of people don't understand that. They think it must be a response to deprivation that you vote for. That wouldn't make sense. Why

vote to cut off the flow of money from London if you're on it? (Author Interview with Michael Keating, 16.02.2024)

Ironically, however, the period when support for Scottish independence reached its highest point was not during "good times," but during a period marked by economic crisis and increasing poverty. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily contradict Keating's observation, since the British state, once seen as an institution providing employment and social welfare, had come to be perceived as the source of social cuts, unemployment, and inequality (Davidson, 2010). The SNP's association of austerity with the "Westminster consensus" has played a significant role in changing this perception (Foley, 2024, p. 128)

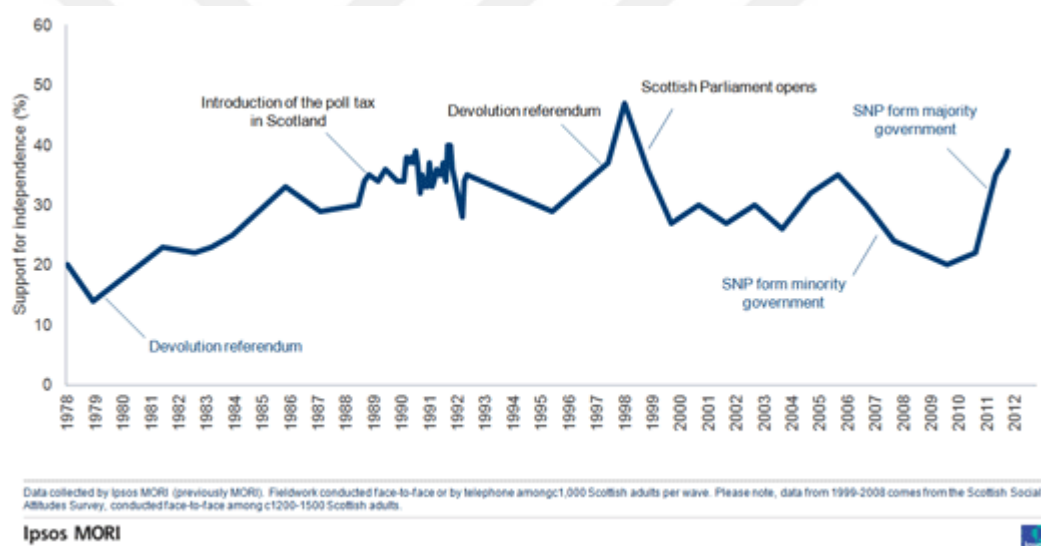


Figure 10. Support for independence in Scotland⁴¹

Source: IPSOS MORI

But to what extent did the SNP's policies and political economy program coincide with all this anti-austerity rhetoric? As examined in previous chapters, the SNP's economic position has evolved through various phases over time. For a long period following its establishment, the SNP remained relatively silent or held a centrist

⁴¹ According to this table, support for independence appeared to approach 50% by the late 1990s; however, various scholars suggest that this figure was superficial and emphasize that genuine support for independence first emerged after 2012. (see Foley et al., 2022, p. 80-82).

position on economic matters (Newman, 1992). However, from the late 1960s onwards, the party began to adopt a social democratic identity. During the Thatcher era, in an effort to attract Labour's voter base, the SNP positioned itself to the left of Labour. With Labour's shift to the right during the Blair years, the SNP maintained its stance of being "just to the left" of Labour. This strategy, however, meant that as Labour moved rightward, the SNP also started to embrace the neoliberal paradigm. This shift became particularly dominant during John Swinney's leadership and continued to deepen with Alex Salmond's return to leadership.

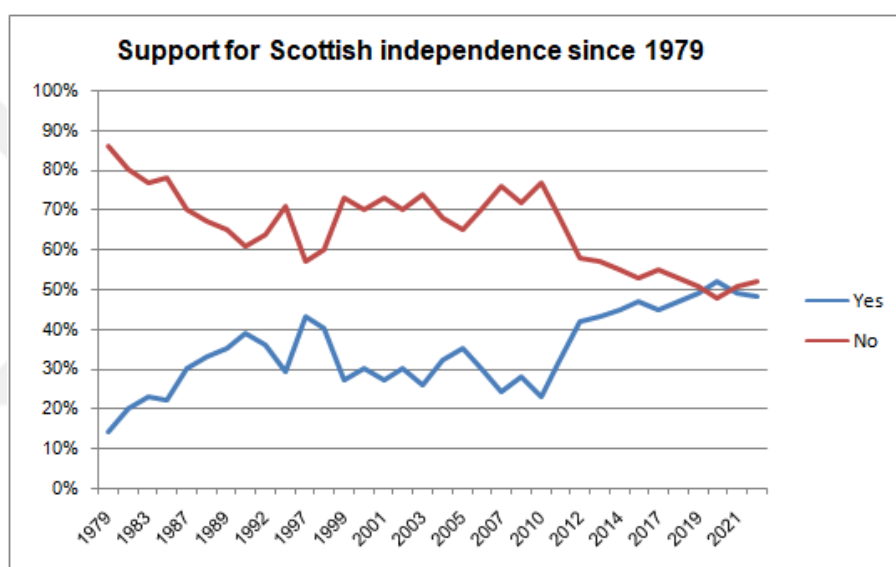


Figure 11. Support for Scottish Independence since 1979
Source: Politics.co.uk

The last campaign in which the SNP ran on a traditional social democratic or left-wing platform was the first elections for the Scottish Parliament in 1999. During this campaign, the SNP strongly criticized Labour for continuing Tory economic policies and vigorously defended the protection of public services (SNP, 1999). In response, New Labour accused the SNP of being a "tax-raising party" (Elias, 2019, p. 12), much as the Tories had done to Labour in England during the election campaigns. This accusation was echoed by tabloid newspapers controlled by large multinational corporations, which at the time supported New Labour (Lynch, 2013, p. 242).

Furthermore, the business sector was quite unsettled by the SNP's policies and was deeply concerned about a potential SNP electoral victory. Before the elections, 100 prominent business figures published an open letter declaring their support for Labour and opposing the SNP (Cuthbert & Cuthbert, 2009, p. 110).

Before the election campaign began, polls showed the SNP in first place (Lynch, 2013). However, by the time the election was over, the SNP was well behind Labour as the second largest party. This result prompted the SNP leadership to reassess its economic policies. The lesson the SNP drew from the election results was the need to adopt a more pro-business program to mitigate the hostility of the bourgeoisie and the media under its control. The "Economic Strategy" document released by the SNP after coming to power in 2007 was striking in showing the transformation in this direction. The focus of the SNP's strategy had moved away from social justice and public services to "economic growth". To achieve economic growth, the SNP advocated for a regime characterized by low taxes and a light regulatory touch. If fiscal sovereignty were attained, the SNP promised further tax cuts: "Make the case for Scotland to have fuller, and eventually full, responsibility for tax raising and public spending, utilizing this to make Scotland the lowest taxed part of the UK" (Scottish Government, 2007, p. 29).

It was evident that Scotland had an economic growth problem: "Scotland's economic growth in recent decades has under-performed relative to both the UK and other comparable European countries. Over 30 years (1977 to 2007), Scotland's annual average growth in GDP was 1.9%, well below that of comparable European countries, and significantly below the UK average of 2.4%" (Scottish Government 2009, p. 3). However, Scotland also faced significant challenges in areas such as social justice and poverty. In a country where social democratic values were

supposedly dominant, half of the land was owned by just 432 individuals (Foley & Ramand, 2014, p. 49). Glasgow, once a gigantic industrial hub and later hailed as one of the most successful examples of "urban renaissance" on the basis of market reform since the 1980s, had neighborhoods with some of the worst statistics in Europe for average male life expectancy, child poverty, and deaths related to drugs, alcohol, violence, suicide (Davidson, 2014, p. 24; Foley & Ramand, 2014, p. 59). What is striking is that the SNP began to embrace the neoliberal argument that social equality could be achieved through economic growth driven by the efficient functioning of the market economy.

Cuthbert and Cuthbert (2009, p. 106) described the SNP's economic program as "neoliberalism with a heart": "The SNP's economic strategy is a variant of the neo-liberal 'Washington' consensus, which has dominated the economic strategy of all major UK parties, and more widely has landed the world economy in such deep trouble." The neoliberal nature of this model, whose key words were economic growth, competitiveness, low tax and productivity was explicit. But where did the "with a heart" part of this neoliberal model come from?

Despite this "neoliberal turn", the SNP still advocated for certain public regulations and social welfare policies. Firstly, the party opposed further privatization. It criticized the privatization of the Royal Mail, which was outside its jurisdiction, and maintained the public nature of the National Health System (NHS)⁴². Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter 6, the SNP implemented policies that set Scotland apart from the rest of the UK, such as making university education free

⁴² In the White Paper published in November 2013, the SNP included the following point under the heading "Gains from Independence": "Public services can be kept in public hands. The Scottish Parliament has the power to keep the NHS in public hands but it could not stop other services such as the Royal Mail being privatised by Westminster". (Scottish Government, 2013, p. xii)

for Scottish students, abolishing prescription charges, and freezing council tax. Through these policies, the SNP positioned itself to the left of Labour. Moreover, the SNP did not retreat from these policies despite the cuts to the central budget caused by the economic crisis (Heald, 2020). Although it has limited powers in terms of fiscal sovereignty, it has sought to keep public spending cuts lower than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In Spain, the transition from a minority government under the PSOE to a PP government with an absolute majority in the national parliament posed a significant challenge for the CiU government. As examined in Chapter 5, the PP's neocentralist strategy, which began in 2000, intensified during its years in opposition and played a central role in the Constitutional Court's decision to effectively nullify Catalonia's statute reform. At a time when the CiU had returned to regional power with a promise of a fiscal pact, the prospects of achieving a positive outcome in negotiations with the PP seemed highly unlikely.

On the other hand, there was a convergence between the PP and CiU regarding economic policies. Traditionally, CiU was a party that embraced the neoliberal paradigm, advocating for privatizations, market-oriented reforms, and cuts in public spending. From the onset of the crisis, CiU adopted and championed an economic program based on fiscal tightening and austerity, as outlined by the German government. For example, when the PSOE introduced its first austerity package, other opposition parties in the national parliament voted against it, while CiU MPs voted in favor. Similarly, when the PP presented a budget proposal that deepened austerity measures, CiU supported it, despite the fact that the PP already held an absolute majority and did not require their support. CiU also supported the

PP's labor market flexibilization bill, which faced strong opposition from unions and opposed by all other opposition parties (Carreras et al., 2018).

Following its return to power after the November 2010 Catalan parliamentary elections, the CiU has strictly applied this neoliberal paradigm to its management of the Generalitat's budget. In the face of the Generalitat's unsustainable debt burden and central cuts to regional budgetary resources, the CiU implemented a drastic austerity program. As part of this program, the CiU government decided to close some healthcare facilities, slash hospital budgets, and increase prescription charges. The government also imposed similar cuts in education and other social services. It also froze public sector salaries and halted new hiring (Nuñez, 2023).

It is true that the CiU government took power under extremely difficult conditions, with the European Union imposing austerity measures, the Spanish government making cuts to the regional budget, and the Generalitat deeply mired in debt. Given these circumstances, was austerity politics inevitable? More than a decade later, in an interview I conducted with him in his office at Palau Robert, Mas defends the position that these policies were indeed inevitable:

I believe there was no room for maneuver. We have to place ourselves in that context, and that context was very different from the current one. That context was shaped not by the decisions of the Catalan government, nor by the government of Valencia, nor by the government of the Balearic Islands; it was the same everywhere. It was dictated by European policy, agreed upon by all the States, which focused on controlling the deficit and public debt and became known as austerity policy. Therefore, the European prescription for dealing with the financial crisis of 2008-2014 was austerity, and austerity means spending little and borrowing little. That's what austerity means. And this was imposed by the Germans with the approval of many other States, even those States that opposed it, some of which were major European States. Even they failed because they couldn't change that policy ... Even that, if we focus this on the case of Catalonia, Valencia, or any other Spanish autonomy, there was an additional problem: if the policy was not to spend and to avoid deficits or keep them under control, the States could balance between cutting spending and increasing revenue. The autonomies could only cut spending because they don't have revenue policies. We don't control taxes; those are controlled by the Spanish State. (Interview with Artur Mas, 09.01.2023)

Despite Mas's assertion of "no room for maneuver," it is important to remember that beyond the issue of the Generalitat's fiscal powers, CiU and Mas have ideologically defended austerity and fiscal tightening policies during this period, without criticizing the causes of the crisis, such as the financial system and the deep inequalities caused by the socio-economic structure. "The conceptual framework on which we wanted to build our government action was known as the three A's: thinning, agility, and austerity (*aprimament, agilitat i austeriat*)" (Mas, 2020).

Andreu Mas-Colell, a renowned economist who served as the Minister of Economy and Knowledge of Catalonia in the CiU governments between 2010 and 2016, and his team also assessed austerity in their book published in 2018 as follows:

At the risk of being misunderstood, we would also like to say that a phase of austerity from time to time is not necessarily a bad thing. Not everything established during periods of expansion needs to be consolidated. ... Periods of austerity can help break spending dynamics that are not sufficiently justified. However, for austerity to be virtuous, it is essential that the expenses eliminated are not the easy ones (perhaps because they lack well-organized interest groups behind them, or, like investment projects, because their inertia is not completely automatic: every specific project ends, which provides an opportunity to avoid rushing into starting a new one) (Carrera et al., 2018, p. 37-38)

Addressing the concept of austerity with such naivety during a period when austerity policies dramatically disrupted millions of lives through unemployment and cuts in social spending, particularly in healthcare, is striking in how it reflects a deep-rooted belief in the neoliberal paradigm. On the other hand, it was unlikely that the Generalitat could emerge from its debt crisis solely through austerity and incidental loan repayment assistance from the Spanish government. Additionally, many other autonomous communities were facing conditions similar to those of the Generalitat. In response, the central government established the Autonomous Liquidity Fund (Fondo de Liquidez Autonómica – FLA) in 2012 to assist regional governments with

their financial difficulties. However, the fact that the Generalitat utilized 40% of the Fund's resources in its first year and 43% in its second year highlighted the severity of the crisis in Catalonia compared to other autonomous regions (Ortiz, 2015, p. 86)⁴³. Consequently, the Generalitat's excessive debt burden made it increasingly financially dependent on Madrid, while the dissatisfaction caused by austerity policies placed the CiU government under dual pressure from both above and below.

In the end, the central government prevented the Generalitat's financial collapse, but it did so by inflicting significant hardship on the CiU government and causing substantial damage to their bilateral relations. The core issue here was the central government's steps that could be described as “changing the rules of the game while the game was still in progress”:

There was minimal mutual trust in the fiscal dimension, which was dramatically broken later; first at the end of 2011, when Salgado⁴⁴ did not send us the budgetary funds from the third additional provision of the Statute, and then in July 2012, when Montoro⁴⁵ lowered the deficit target for the autonomous communities right after Europe had raised the Spanish target. (Carrera et al., 2018, p. 37)

This situation made obtaining fiscal sovereignty for Catalonia even more urgent from CiU's perspective. CiU was proposing that “Catalonia should have its own financing model—similar to the *concierto económico*—with the goal of managing and deciding on the entirety of Catalonia's tax resources” (CiU, 2010). Therefore, CiU's demand was to adapt the system applied in the Basque Country to Catalonia as well. With Rajoy's (2019, p. 242) words:

What this initiative proposed was that the Autonomous Community of Catalonia would have full capacity to set and design taxes across its entire territory, as well as to manage and collect them through its own tax agency. In

⁴³ Through the FLA and other financing mechanisms, such as the Supplier Payment Fund (Pago a Proveedores - FPP), by 2015 the State had already paid 60% of the Generalitat's debt, which totaled 72.274 billion euros (“El Estado controla”, 2016).

⁴⁴ Elena Salgado served as the Minister of Economy during the PSOE government from April 2009 to December 2011.

⁴⁵ Cristóbal Montoro was the Minister of Finance during the PP government from 2011 to 2018.

other words, it would have fiscal sovereignty. However, it expressed its willingness to contribute to solidarity with others through a contribution that would be determined later.

Rajoy summarized it this way, arguing that such a financial system, as applied in the Basque Country and Navarre, was completely unconstitutional for Catalonia. But given the failure of the statute reform and the fact that the PP held an absolute majority in government, was such a reform even possible under these conditions? According to Mas, the fiscal pact proposal could have been an opportunity for the PP, which had blocked the Statute reform, to mend its relationship with Catalonia:

My offer to Rajoy was clear: you have undermined the Statute, but I propose a way for you to make amends and find a way out. Let's talk about taxation and resources, and find a way to address the Catalan grievance from the perspective of financing. (2020, ebook)

Indeed, between 2011 and 2012, Mas and Rajoy held a series of secret as well as publicly known meetings to negotiate CiU's proposal. However, much like the Statute reform, the fiscal pact proposal was entirely unconstitutional and politically unacceptable to Rajoy: "Their demand broke the spirit of our constitutional text, violated the principle of equality among Spaniards, and was deeply unfair to the rest of the Autonomous Communities that make up our country" (Rajoy, 2019).

Consequently, no agreement was reached in these negotiations, and as mentioned in Chapter 5, following the meeting between the two leaders in September 2012, Mas announced that Rajoy's government had definitively rejected the fiscal pact proposal and that his party would enter a new phase under the framework of the "right to decide."

The issue of fiscal sovereignty, which CDC articulated as "fiscal looting" or "Spain is stealing from us," became a pressing concern for Scotland as well, especially in the context of austerity. The block grant system explained in Chapter 4 meant that public spending expansions or contractions in England had a direct impact

on Scotland: “We are faced with a period of unprecedented Westminster budget cuts as a result of the reduction in Scotland’s block grant: a reduction of £1.3 billion in the year ahead. And up to 2014-15 we will see spending reductions of over 11% in real terms, with a 36% cut in our capital budget over the same period” (SNP, 2011, p. 8). Consequently, the austerity program that began under Labour and intensified under the Con-Dem government also led to a contraction of Scotland's public budget (Kerley, 2019 p. 128; Scott & Right, 2012). In the introduction to the "Fiscal Autonomy in Scotland" document, published by the Scottish Government in February 2009 as part of the National Conversation, then-Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth John Swinney described the problem as follows:

(...) [W]ithin the current framework, Scotland’s Government is tied to a fixed budget determined by Westminster. The Scottish Government has no scope to borrow prudently or to boost spending, and it has very limited scope to cut taxes to spur growth. In short, at the time of Scotland’s greatest economic need, its Government does not have all the powers to properly protect its citizens and businesses. ... The Scottish Government firmly believes that for Scotland to achieve its full economic potential, it must have control of the economic levers of an independent country. (Swinney, 2009, p. 1).

The Scotland Act 2012, as discussed in Chapter 6, provided the Scottish government with new powers over tax revenue control and borrowing. However, these new powers were too limited for the SNP: “The Scottish Parliament is responsible for just 7 percent of taxes raised in Scotland. Even after the new tax powers of the Scotland Act 2012, this figure will only increase to around 15 percent” (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 90).

Within this picture, evoking the Catalan nationalists' “fiscal looting” narrative, the SNP claimed that Scottish citizens paid more tax than the UK average: “Over each of the last 32 years, estimates show Scotland has contributed more tax per head of population than the UK as a whole” (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 4). Considering that the per capita income in Scotland was roughly equal to or slightly

below the UK average, the SNP reached this conclusion by factoring in the profits from North Sea oil and gas resources, 90% of which were located within Scottish waters: “Even when oil and gas revenues are excluded, estimated tax receipts per head in Scotland are broadly equivalent to the UK figure. When Scotland’s oil and gas receipts are added, tax revenue per head in Scotland is nearly 20 percent higher than the UK average” (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 68).

As a result, in both cases we saw that austerity policies weakened the center vis-à-vis the periphery. Central governments, once identified with social welfare policies, have now become the primary agents of austerity (della Porta, 2015; Hayes, 2016). This frame provided regional governments with opportunities for "blame assignment" (Béland & Lecours, 2019) or victimization narratives (Dalle Mulle, 2018), and it allowed the SNP and CDC to more forcefully raise the issue of "fiscal sovereignty," albeit in different forms. Consequently, austerity policies accelerated the disengagement of the masses in the periphery from the mainstream state-wide parties, made the masses more receptive to radical alternatives and triggered an upsurge in grassroots movements.

7.3 Radicalization of the masses

“For many actors in both places, independence was not seen as an end in itself, but a democratic means to the realisation of greater social equality”
Della Porta et al., 2017

The Great Recession unleashed a wave of global social mobilization. Protests against austerity and worsening economic conditions quickly took on a political dimension, leading to the collapse of dictatorial regimes in some countries (Tunisia and Egypt) and challenging the current state of democratic systems in Europe (della Porta, 2015). Inspired by the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, square

movements emerged in Europe and the United States, intersecting anti-austerity and pro-democracy demands (Flesher Fominaya, 2016). In Spain, the 15-M or Indignados movement became one of the most robust examples of this wave in Europe. The mobilization, which prominently featured slogans like “*Democracia real ya!*” (Real Democracy Now!) and “*No nos representan*” (They don’t represent us), rejected the two-party system and called on voters to abstain from supporting either mainstream party in the upcoming local elections what would be held in 22 May 2011 (Antentas, 2013).

The movement was strongest in Madrid and Barcelona. In Barcelona, the movement coincided with the time when the Catalan parliament was discussing the 2012 budget. At that time, CiU government, which was championing austerity, faced major protests from the 15-M movement against its budget proposal (Rico & Liñeira, 2014). Crowds gathered in front of the Catalan parliament, attempting to prevent deputies and ministers from entering the building. The image of President Artur Mas avoiding confrontation with the crowd by arriving at the parliament building by helicopter and not entering through the main doors became one of the most memorable scenes of this period (Juliana, 2020). This episode was striking in showing the grassroots pressure on CDC during that time.

Although not to the same extent as in Spain and Catalonia, anti-austerity movement also emerged in the UK. As the Con-Dem government stepped up spending cuts, numerous strikes, protests, and marches took place from the end of 2010 onwards, and organizations like "UK Uncut" appeared (Street, 2015). Thus, this context in Europe provided "a powerful impetus for mobilization" and "re-politicization" (Flesher Fominaya, 2016, pp. 4-9). As Della Porta et al. pointed out,

this re-politicization extended not only to the socio-economic dimension but also to other dimensions of political space:

As the financial crisis degenerated into a crisis of political legitimacy, with declining trust in representative institutions, old political cleavages re-emerged. This was visible, first and foremost in a revived attention to social justice within a class cleavage, but was also visible in a reactivation, in various forms, of a centre–periphery cleavage. This has in particular regained momentum as sub-state entities have been pushing for their secession within the European Union. (Della Porta et al., 2020, p. 155)

As we saw in previous chapters, the center-periphery cleavage was already active in Catalonia and Scotland when the global financial crisis began. However, with the onset of the Great Recession, the territorial debate, which had previously been confined to the institutional sphere in Scotland, spilled over into the streets, while in Catalonia, the sovereigntist social movement that had already begun transformed into a massive popular mobilization (della Porta et al., 2017). It is well known that the relationship between the economic crisis and the rise of secessionism is complex, and it is difficult to establish a direct causal link between the two. Nevertheless, it is clear that the re-politicization and deterioration of economic conditions caused by the Great Recession, as well as the convergence of territorial and economic issues in many contexts during this period played a significant role in the rise of the sovereigntist movements⁴⁶. The following subsections will examine the development of these mass sovereigntist/secessionist movements and their impact on the strategies of the CDC and SNP.

⁴⁶ For Catalonia see: Argelaguet, 2014; della Porta et al., 2020; Dowling, 2014; McRoberts, 2022; Petithomme, 2017. For Scotland see: Davidson, 2014; della Porta et al., 2017; Foley & Ramand, 2014; Foley, 2024).

7.3.1 Catalonia: Complex dynamics between the social and the political

The beginning of the sovereigntist social movement in Catalonia goes back to the time of the status reform debates. Already in 2005, hundreds of entities and individuals came together to form *la Plataforma pel Dret de Decidir* (the Platform for the Right to Decide), advocating for the Catalan nation's right to self-determination (Vilaregut, 2011). The platform's inaugural demonstration took place in February 2006, protesting the agreement between Mas and Zapatero to conclude the statut reform process, which many platform members deemed an unacceptable concession. This demonstration rallied hundreds of thousands of people under the banner “We are a nation, and we have the right to decide,” with the support of the ERC, which opposed any changes to the statute once it had been approved by the Catalan parliament (Requejo & Sanjaume, 2013).

A year later, in December 2007, the platform organized an even larger demonstration to protest inadequate infrastructure investment by the central government, particularly during the collapse of public rail services (RENFE). The primary slogan of this demonstration was: “We are a nation, and we say: Enough! We have the right to decide on our infrastructures” (Garcia Pagan, 2007). This action is noteworthy in that, as early as 2007, it linked the question of the economy to the question of the territory.

Moreover, an innovative form of civic mobilization accompanied the street protests and the rise of civil associations advocating for the “right to decide.” Since the Spanish Constitution does not explicitly permit regional governments to conduct legal, binding referendums on independence, Catalan municipalities took the initiative to organize informal, non-binding plebiscites at the local level. This grassroots movement, which developed autonomously from political parties, began

in Arenys de Munt, a small town near Barcelona, in 2009. The municipality of Arenys de Munt conducted an unofficial referendum in September 2009, facilitated by civil organizations, inquiring whether citizens supported the idea of the Catalan nation becoming an independent, democratic, and socially oriented state within the European Union. In this town of 8,000 inhabitants, 41% of the population participated in the referendum, and an overwhelming 96% voted in favor of secession. The extensive media coverage of this referendum inspired similar actions in other municipalities, evolving into a prominent expression of the social movement advocating for the “right to decide.” Between 2009 and 2011, 552 out of the 947 municipalities organized unofficial referendums. The overall turnout was 18.1%, encompassing approximately 800,000 participants, and an overwhelming 91.7% of voters expressed support for secession (Muñoz & Guinjoan, 2013). This unique form of grassroots mobilization not only underscored the Catalan people's strong desire for full national recognition within the Spanish state but also reflected the increasing sentiment for independence in Catalonia.

This sentiment was also reflected in opinion polls. For example, the Center for Sociological Research (*Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, CIS), a statistical agency under the Spanish Ministry of the Presidency, asked citizens in Catalonia about their views on independence three times, in 1996, 2001, and 2012. In 1996 and 2001, the question was: "Personally, would you be for or against an independent Catalonia?" In 2012, instead of this question, three options were proposed: independence, more autonomy, or the current state. According to CIS opinion polls, the percentage of citizens in favor of Catalonia's independence increased from 33.6% to 41.1% over sixteen years.

Table 8. Support for independence in Catalonia (1996-2012)

Year	Yes	No	Undecided	No response	Extrapolation of results	
					Yes	No
1996	33.6	53.5	10.8	2.2	38.6	61.4
2001	35.9	48.1	13.3	2.8	42.7	57.3
Year	Independence	More Autonomy	Existing Situation		Extrapolation of results	
					Yes	No
2012	41.1	26	16		49.5	50.5

Source: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas

In addition, since 2005, a body of the Generalitat, the Center for Opinion Studies (*Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió*, CEO), has also been conducting surveys on this issue.

The CEO's question offers four options for the future of Catalonia: an independent state, a federal state, an autonomous community, and a region. Table 4 shows that support for independence, which had been on a slow upward trend since 2006, became the most popular trend with a particularly large increase since 2011. Peaking in 2013, it was the first choice in Catalonia for a long time, although it has been slowly declining since then.

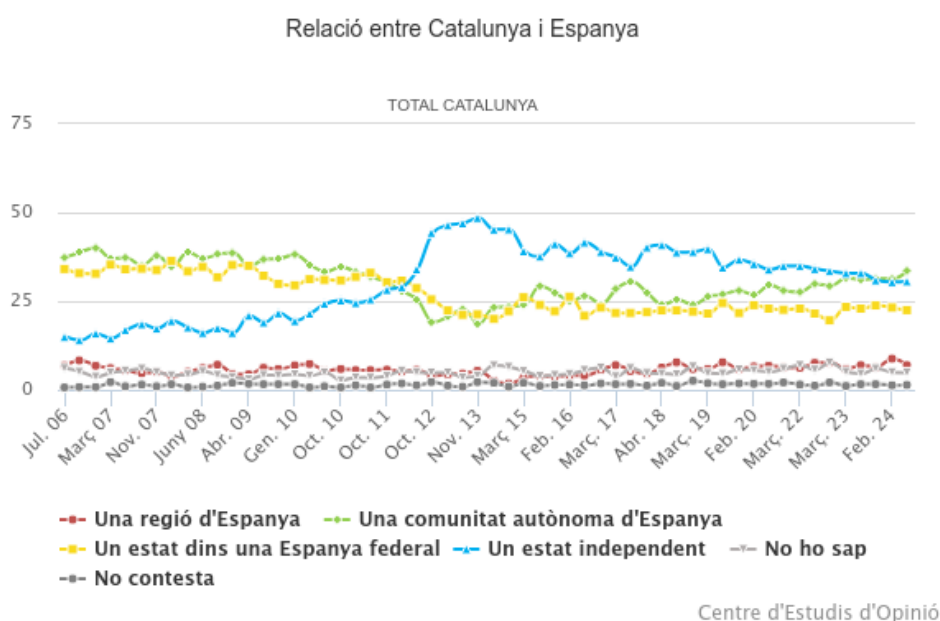


Figure 12. Relation between Catalonia and Spain (2006-2024)

Source: Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió

And starting in 2011, the CEO started posing the following question: "More precisely, if a referendum were held tomorrow to decide on the independence of Catalonia, what would you do?" The affirmative response to this question also increased from 42.9% to 54.7% between June 2011 and December 2013.

Table 9. Support for Independence in Catalonia (2011-2013)

Date	Yes	No	Abstention
June 2011	42.9	28.2	23.3
November 2012	57	20.5	14.3
December 2013	54.7	22.1	15.7

Source: Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió

According to the CEO poll from 2013, the year with the highest level of support for independence, support for independence among political party supporters and across the left-right spectrum is as follows:

The percentage of "yes" is very high among supporters of Catalan nationalist parties: ERC (94.5%), CiU (78.0%) and CUP (86.3%). It is also the majority percentage in ICV (43.8%). However, it is a clear minority in PSC (14.4%) and in PP (5.1%) ... The self-assessment on the ideological axis in the left-right continuum is associated with the options in the referendum, so that the percentage for independence is highest among those who are at the extreme far left (81.8%) and descending gradually to the extreme right (18.2%). However, note that more than 50% are in favor of independence in all positions ranging from the center to the left. (Argelaguet, 2014, p. 123-4).

The fact that only 36% of CiU supporters favored independence in 2011, compared to 78% in 2013, highlights the significant shift within the party during this short period (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2011; 2013). Moreover, the level of support for independence among the base of the three parties representing Catalan nationalism demonstrates that secessionism has become completely dominant within Catalanism. On the other hand, the strong correlation between independence and the left challenges arguments that view the rise of secessionism merely as a reflection of

"bourgeois nationalism" or "rising nationalist populism" (see della Porta & Portos, 2020; McRoberts, 2022, pp. 200-206).

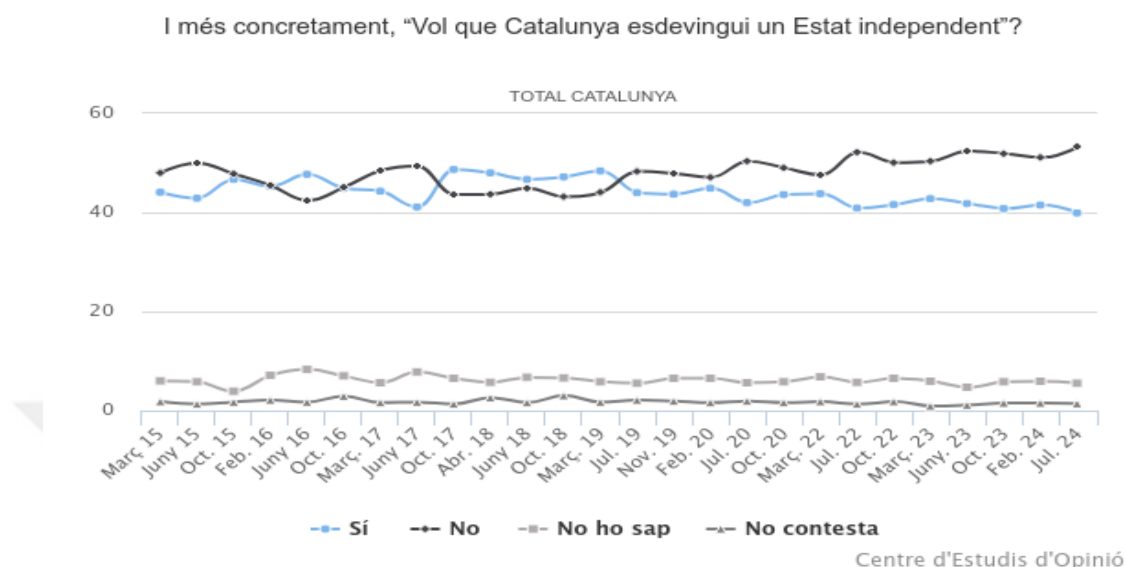


Figure 13. Support for Independence in Catalonia (2015-2024)

Source: Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió

Starting from 2011, at the organizational level as well, pro-independence trend became more visible within the "right to decide" movement. In December 2011, the *Associació de Municipis per la Independència* (Association of Municipalities for Independence, AMI) was established with the primary goal of coordinating local institutions' efforts to achieve the creation of an independent Catalan state within the European Union. Founded with the participation of the mayors of 157 municipalities, AMI's membership quickly grew to encompass more than three-quarters of all municipalities in Catalonia⁴⁷. Its primary mission was to promote and coordinate efforts among local governments to support the independence cause, including organizing events, passing pro-independence resolutions, and mobilizing local populations. During the initial years of AMI's formation CiU mayors played a

⁴⁷ In 2018, a total of 787 out of 947 municipalities in Catalonia ("La AMI elegirà", 2018) and all four provincial councils (diputacions) were members of AMI ("Les quatre diputacions", 2015). However, major municipalities, including the Barcelona City Council, were not members of AMI, and these 787 municipalities represented less than 50% of Catalonia's population (Dowling, 2018, p. 151).

significant role in the establishment and expansion of the organization. The first president of AMI, Josep Maria Vila d'Abadal i Serra, was a militant of UDC, minority partner of CiU⁴⁸. Many of the municipalities that joined AMI during this period were governed by mayors from CiU. However, it should be underlined that the AMI is a transversal structure, with representatives of the ERC and CUP, and even the ICV, PSC and other left-wing municipalist tendencies (Cramerí, 2014, p. 42).

Shortly after the founding of AMI, in March 2012, the Catalan National Assembly (Assemblea Nacional Catalana, ANC) was established. This civic organization played a decisive and strategic role during the *Procès*, with the aim of achieving Catalonia's political independence in the form of a legal, democratic, and social state. The ANC, rapidly expanding with local branches throughout Catalonia and including members from CDC, ERC, and CUP, became an organization operating autonomously from political parties and exerting public pressure on them (Dowling, 2018, pp. 99-102; Marcet, 2017, p. 89). In addition to ANC and AMI, another active and mass civil society organization during this period was Òmnium Cultural. Founded as early as 1961 to preserve and promote Catalan culture, Òmnium became one of the two main organizations, alongside ANC, organizing pro-independence civic mobilizations, with the rise of secessionism.

Thus, in the Catalan case, we see that grassroots movements, alongside political parties, emerged as influential actors shaping the political landscape. The first significant example of this, as mentioned in Chapter 5, occurred in the aftermath of the Constitutional Court's ruling on the Statute reform. Immediately following the

⁴⁸ During the *Procès*, due to the UDC leadership's stance against independence, Vila d'Abadal soon left UDC and, along with the secessionist minority that had also left the party, led the formation of the Christian Democratic and secessionist party *Democrates de Catalunya* (Democrats of Catalonia).

decision, the "We are a nation. We decide" demonstration on July 10, 2010, became the largest protest in Catalonia's history, with more than 1 million people participating in a country of seven and a half million (Barbeta, 2010). Organized by Òmnium Cultural, the demonstration was called for by over a thousand civil organizations. Moreover, the protest saw high-level participation from political parties, except the PP and the C's. The President of the Generalitat and the President of the Catalan Parliament marched at the front, followed closely by the leaders of PSC, CiU, ERC, and ICV. On the other hand, although the main theme of the demonstration was the "right to decide," it was notable that the most chanted slogan was already "*In-de-pen-den-cia*": "The chants of 'In-de-pen-dèn-ci-a!' are constant, and by the end of the evening, only a deaf person could deny that 'In-de-pen-dèn-ci-a!' was the most chanted cry." (Monzó, 2010).

Although this massive demonstration initially seemed like a spontaneous reaction, nationalist activists had actually been anticipating such a ruling from the Constitutional Court since 2006, and were preparing to push institutional actors into a confrontational position once the decision was announced (Basta, 2018).

From this period onwards, the *Diada*, the national day of Catalonia, became the primary occasion for massive national mobilization. Particularly under the leadership of the ANC, the 2012 *Diada* marked a new peak, both in terms of participation—nearing 1.5 million people—and its explicit secessionist nature, as reflected in the main banner, "Catalonia, New State in Europe" (Barbeta, 2012). This massive demonstration served as a significant catalyst in terms of the pressure it exerted on the CiU government and its impact on CDC's territorial strategy. In Mas's own words:

The momentum around the issue of the fiscal pact gained traction after the demonstration with the slogan "Catalonia, new state of Europe" on the

National Day of 2012. That demonstration, in which the citizens effectively launched the *Procés*, put pressure on the government and on me in particular. A million and a half people demonstrating in favor of Catalonia becoming a state was unprecedented and marked the beginning of a new era in popular Catalanist demands ... The situation could not be prolonged any further, and with Mariano Rajoy, beyond the pleasantries, we had to move into a "take it or leave it" scenario. (Mas, 2020: ebook)

The following year's *Diada* took place under circumstances where the CiU government, supported externally by ERC, had already signed the Declaration of Sovereignty and promised a referendum on independence. Therefore, the main demand of the 2013 *Diada* was for the CiU government to announce a clear date for the independence referendum. The ANC organized a major mobilization under the name "Catalan Way towards Independence" together with other organizations like Òmnium and AMI. Inspired by a similar event during which the capitals of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were connected by a human chain in 1989 during their own independence struggles, they formed a human chain along the eastern Catalan border, from El Pertús on the French border to Alcanar in Tarragona, with the support of CDC, ERC, and CUP (Cramerí, 2015, pp. 112-3). Around 1.6 million people participated in this mobilization, surpassing the large demonstration of the previous year (Barbeta, 2013).

Diada 2014 took place amidst the uncertainties surrounding the independence referendum announced by the CiU government for November 9th. As discussed in Chapter 5, with the PP government firmly stating that it would not permit a referendum and with deep divisions among secessionist forces on how the referendum should be conducted; the mobilization, led by the ANC, was held with the slogan "Now is the time, united for the new country." Approximately 2 million people participated in the demonstration, where the demand for the referendum to be held at any cost took center stage. The crowd formed a "Catalan Way" in the shape

of a V, symbolizing victory, along Barcelona's two main avenues (Garcia Pagan, 2014c).

Furthermore, the 9-N referendum itself can be considered a social movement. Since this referendum was organized as a "participatory process" officially led by civil society organizations rather than directly under the institutional organization of the Generalitat, in order to circumvent the central government's obstruction, it involved a significant level of grassroots mobilization. With 2.3 million people participating, della Porta et al. (2017) referred to this mobilization as a "referendum from below."

As a result, these massive popular mobilizations undoubtedly had a significant impact on the radicalization of CDC's territorial strategy. Notably, Diada 2012 played a decisive role in accelerating the "fiscal pact" process, leading to Rajoy's outright rejection of fiscal reform and pushing CDC towards an early election with a promise of an independence referendum, despite having two years left in its government term. These pressures from below continued to play a critical role in the *Procès*, complicating decision-making processes during later crucial moments. Marta Pascal, who served as the spokesperson for CDC from 2015 until its dissolution in 2016 and later as the general coordinator of the newly established PDeCAT until 2018, reflects on the role of civic organizations as follows:

The erosion of political parties, along with the emergence or existence of civil society organizations like AMI, ANC, Òmnium, etc., created a tension in leadership. This dynamic led to a perception that while political parties never fulfill their promises, while civil society does, resulting in a situation where one puts pressure on the other. This creates a dynamic that, in key moments, is always very challenging and difficult to resolve. (Author Interview with Marta Pascal, 30.01.2023)

On the other hand, as Crameri (2015) emphasizes, this picture should not lead to a simplistic conclusion that attributes the rise of secessionism in Catalonia solely to

bottom-up pressure. We have already seen that signs of change in CDC's territorial strategy began to emerge as early as the mid-1990s, and this process accelerated after the party moved into opposition in 2003. Consequently, the relationship between CDC and civic organizations is reciprocal and complex.

Another question that arises at this point is whether the Mas government's shift first to sovereigntism and then to secessionism was a genuine transformation or merely a maneuver to remain in power. Various reasons have been suggested for this shift, including the desire to cover up CDC's corruption scandals, divert attention from the austerity policies it implemented, maintain Catalanism's leadership in competition with the rising ERC, and use the growing independence movement as a bargaining tool against the central government (see Barrio & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2016; Dowling, 2018, p. 151; McRoberts, 2022, p. 191). While it is impossible to definitively answer this question, it is certain that a broad segment of the population viewed this process with skepticism. A CUP militant summarized the widespread sentiment on this issue as follows:

In 2012, Mas was negotiating in Madrid for a fiscal pact, while here the mobilization was shouting for independence. It was never their [CDC] intention, nor that of the Catalan bourgeoisie, to become independentists or to consider a break with Madrid. So that was imposed on them by the movement. And they, in trying to ride that wave, would say it [independence] from time to time, but that's all; there is no deeper political will behind it. They never truly had it. (Author Interview, 10.05.2022)

In relation to the criticisms raised in this manner, the next chapter will provide a detailed analysis of CDC's strategic decisions, particularly those made in the lead-up to and following the referendum. Following Catalonia, the next subsection will assess the relationship between mass movements and the SNP during the economic crisis.

7.3.2 Scotland: A “top down” process towards independence?

*[Rupert Murdoch] arrived with a pre-conceived vision of a Celtic low-tax tiger ...
Then he saw Trots on the street.
Pike, 2016*

Compared to the process in Catalonia, the common interpretation is that the dynamic in Scotland was top down (see Crameri, 2015, p. 105). Indeed, the secessionist social mobilization in Catalonia was so massive that it to some extent overshadowed the social dynamics in Scotland. For instance, according to Catalan journalist Vicent Partal (cited in Crameri, 2015), director of VilaWeb:

Perhaps we should take the opportunity to highlight some notable differences between that process and ours. Two very notable ones: the plurality of the social base driving it and the origin of the proposal. From the top down in the Scottish case, from the bottom-up in the Catalan case ... In Scotland, the process is almost entirely led by the Scottish National Party, which faces opposition from a very ideologically diverse coalition that claims to represent the cross-section of Scottish society. ... In Scotland, the pro-independence supporters will have to work very hard if they want to win the referendum, and as of now, the mission seems very difficult. (Partal, 2013)

In fact, when Parta wrote these lines in February 2013, he was partially right. At that time, according to polls, the "No" votes were about 25 percentage points ahead of the "Yes" side, and Yes Scotland, which had launched its campaign six months earlier, was not yet visible enough in the media. As a result, compared to Catalonia, the movement appeared less powerful, with weaker internal differences and competition. However, as the Yes Scotland campaign progressed, dramatic transformations began to unfold, which no political leadership had anticipated.

Significant mass mobilizations had taken place in Scotland's recent history. In the late '80s, there were massive protests against Thatcher's Poll Tax and the 2003 Iraq War (Foley et al., 2022, p. 80). However, as one Yes Scotland activist pointed out, "Scotland has traditionally had a really strong political independence movement, but we've lacked a popular independence movement. And what happened in the 2014

campaign was the popular movement was created" (Author Interview, 3.3.2024).

Indeed, between 2012 and 2014, an unprecedented popular mobilization emerged in Scotland's history.

After its formation in May 2012, Yes Scotland had a mountain to overcome. In order to raise public support for independence from around 30% and eventually surpass the 50% threshold, the primary goal of the Yes campaign was to reach out to politically disengaged groups—those who typically did not vote—and persuade them. Voter turnout in Scotland generally fluctuated between 50% and 60%. For instance, participation rates in the 1979 and 1997 referendums were 63.73% and 60.4%, respectively, while in the 2010 general election and the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, turnout was 63.8% and 50.4%, respectively. Therefore, an increase in this percentage could potentially shift the balance in favor of the Yes vote. In this direction, Yes Scotland aimed to reach these people by organizing a strong ground campaign. To achieve this, it was necessary to mobilize the activism power of both the SNP, the traditional radical left, and social movements by conducting door-to-door visits, organizing meetings in communities, in short, using traditional communication methods. In line with this, the first surprise for Yes Scotland, which was established with a relatively small team and budget initially, encountered was the extraordinary interest it attracted in the first months. The gap between the campaign's capacity and the interest it generated ironically led to the establishment of autonomous groups and its transformation into a social movement. Stephen Noon, one of the main organizers and the chief strategist of Yes Scotland, describes this process as follows:

First couple of months, we were just overwhelmed by people wanting us to give them information and materials and all that stuff. In one of those lovely quirks of fate, because the center was so poor at the beginning, people just said, well, we're just going to do it ourselves. The fact of that overwhelming

demand at the beginning, the inability of the center to feed that demand then meant that you had these autonomous organizations. People formed local groups and sectoral groups. We, at the center then got our act together and we began to be able to coordinate and feed. But from the very beginning, because of that initial burst of energy, what happened was there was a breakdown of the command and control style of politics, which is what the political parties do. And it did become a much more devolved situation. You had really active local groups, you had really powerfully active sectoral groups. So things like National Collective, Radical Independence, Women for Independence... These people were actually doing things and they were doing them autonomously. But what we hopefully eventually did, we were able to guide people. (Author Interview with Noon, 19.02.2024)

The hope for change evoked by the concept of “independence”, along with the SNP's promises of a “social and fairer” Scotland and getting rid of “neoliberal Tory” rule once and for all triggered the release of long-dormant social energy in a massive surge. Especially as the referendum date approached, public meetings were being held across the country, Yes activists were going door-to-door calling for voter registration and campaigning for independence (Davidson, 2014).

The Yes campaign was also progressing in a pluralistic and autonomous manner. For example, while the National Collective operated as a cultural movement in favor of independence, the Radical Independence Campaign focused particularly on activities in impoverished working-class neighborhoods. The Greens and SSP were represented in the Yes Scotland executive but conducted their own autonomous activities. While advocating conflicting visions in various areas, notably the economy, all these groups organized active efforts to convince voters in favor of voter registration and independence.

The campaign's success was also reflected in the opinion polls. Since the start of the campaign, support for independence had gradually increased by about 10 points, rising to around 40% and hovering at that level for quite some time. During this period, the Yes campaign was succeeding in influencing the youth and the precarious working-class sectors, as it had initially aimed. One of the reflections of

this success was seen in the voter registration rate. Thanks to the intense efforts of the ground campaign, 97% of eligible voters had registered to vote.

The real surprise, however, began to unfold less than a month before the referendum. Until that point, support for Yes had hovered around 40%, but it began to rise rapidly and caught up with the No vote. According to a YouGov poll, two weeks before the election, the Yes vote had surpassed 50%. As a result, despite the referendum concluding with 55.3% No votes versus 44.7% Yes votes—shaped by the factors we will continue to analyze in the next chapter—the 44.7% support level was an unimaginable increase when the campaign began in 2012.

Scottish independence referendum

If there was a referendum tomorrow on Scotland's future and this was the question, how would you vote? 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' (Excluding Don't knows and Wouldn't votes)

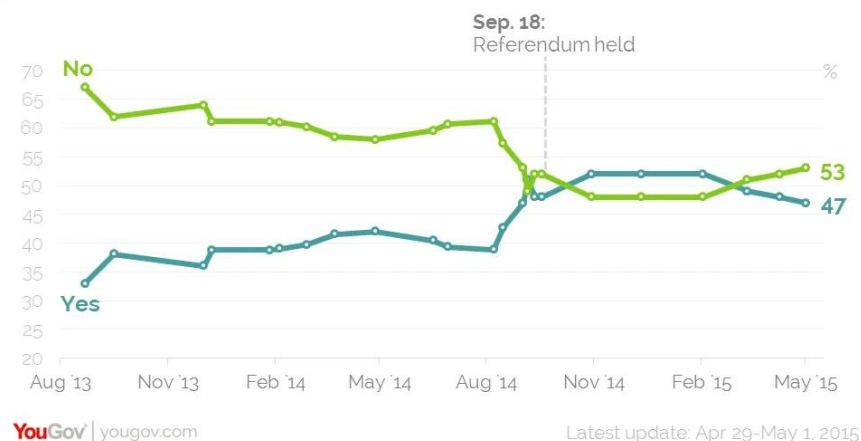


Figure 14. Support for independence in Scotland (2013-2015)
Source: YouGov

On the day of the referendum, the voter turnout was 84.6%, the highest level in Scotland's history. One of the main organizers of Yes Scotland confirmed this by saying: “What we certainly did was we mobilized a lot of people who had not voted in years or decades, they registered to vote, that was because the turnout was very high.” (Author Interview, 22.03.2024)

Who were the agents of this historic turnout? An SSP activist describes them as follows: “The turnout was 84% because the working-class people who don't

usually vote went to vote. They were coming out of the poor schemes, the housing projects, and the slums and voting, and maybe had never voted in their life. They were voting for independence.” (Author Interview, 16.03.2024). Former Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale also draws a similar conclusion:

They are the ones, in my view, who had the lowest view of politicians, the lowest view of Westminster, had no reason to vote, but the referendum gave them a reason to vote and their reason to vote was to vote for change. By that I mean they voted yes ... That people who turned out in that contest that didn't normally cast votes, they were the people that were most acutely exposed to the economic crisis. (Author Interview with Dugdale, 11.03.2024)

As a result, it is clear that in Scotland, million-strong marches similar to those in Catalonia did not occur, and civic organizations were comparatively much weaker. It is also not possible to say that grassroots pressure, as in the case of the CDC, has led to a change in the SNP's political strategy. However, the rise in support for independence from around 30% to becoming neck and neck with the No vote two weeks before the referendum can be attributed not so much to the SNP's moderate framing of independence, as discussed in the previous chapter, but to the autonomous mobilization of grassroots activism. Indeed, many commentators assessing the final weeks of the Yes campaign compared Scotland to “occupied public squares across Europe”, “Indignant citizens in Greece” or “15-M Movement in Spain” (see Foley et al., 2022, p. 87).

7.4 Economy and territory: A subsuming strategy

This chapter examined the impact of the Great Recession and the socio-economic consequences it caused as a "permissive condition" in the process leading to the CDC and SNP's attempts to hold independence referendums. It showed that the combination of the economic crisis with ongoing territorial tension led to the "necessary condition" for public support for independence to, for the first time in

history, become a majoritarian trend in both Scotland and Catalonia. In this context, it argued that The Great Recession created an enabling condition for radical options, functioning as a catalyst that escalated the ongoing center-periphery tensions.

Radicalization in Catalonia found its expression in massive mass mobilizations, the enormous strength of pro-independence civic organizations, and for the first time, public support for independence reaching the 50% level. This grassroots mobilization became an important variable in the transformation of CDC's territorial strategy. In Scotland, the grassroots movement emerged with the launch of the Yes Scotland campaign. The campaign, which started under the leadership of the SNP, quickly went beyond the party's control and transformed into an autonomous social force. This social mobilization played a decisive role in the shift of support for independence from around 30% at the start of the campaign to becoming neck and neck with the No vote prior the referendum day.

With the economic crisis, central governments, to varying degrees, imposed budget cuts on regional governments in both cases. Although their approaches to austerity were entirely different, this situation led both the CiU and SNP governments to impulse their demands for fiscal sovereignty. For the SNP, the main issue was that the economic policies implemented by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition, which was representing a minority political tendency in Scotland, directly affected Scotland through cuts to the block grant. To this situation, which the SNP referred to as a "democratic deficit", was added Labour's support for austerity policies. As a result, the SNP argued that there was a "Westminster Consensus" around austerity and claimed that the only way to escape it was through fiscal sovereignty and independence.

The key issue in Catalonia, however, was the persistent problem of the "fiscal deficit," which became much more pressing with the crisis, pushing the Generalitat's debts to an unsustainable level. At this point, from 2010 to 2012, the demand for a fiscal pact became the most important item on the nationalist agenda for the CDC. Similar to the Basque Country, Catalonia demanded full fiscal autonomy by exiting the interterritorial fiscal system. However, after the PP government definitively rejected this demand, the CDC began to argue that the issue of "fiscal looting" and Catalonia's economic prosperity could only be resolved through independence.

In this context, we see that, in both cases, under the economic crisis, both the CDC and SNP framed the economic case under the territorial cleavage and converged both issues under the heading of "fiscal sovereignty." Scholars have already demonstrated that stateless nationalist parties can subsume economic issues under the territorial dimension within a multidimensional political space (Elias et al., 2015; Massetti & Schakel, 2015; Elias, 2019). Consistent with this conclusion, we observe that, under the economic crisis and on the eve of the independence referendum, both the SNP and CDC followed a subsuming strategy that linked the economy and territory through the slogan of "fiscal sovereignty."

CHAPTER 8

MAKING THE MEANING OF INDEPENDENCE

What are the boundaries of rupture and bargaining between the secessionists and the central state? How do the differences, tensions, alliances, and competition within secessionism play out at the critical juncture? Is secession an exit threat used to increase self-governance, or is it a genuine strategy as the ultimate goal of stateless nationalism, or is it both, raised by different sectors at the same time? This chapter examines how the meaning of independence is constructed at the critical juncture where secession emerges as a concrete option.

The previous chapters primarily dealt with what Soifer refers to as "permissive conditions," that is, the effects of the "context" on party strategies. This chapter, however, will focus beyond context, on "productive conditions," in other words, "choice," meaning the subjective factors. Soifer defined productive conditions as "the aspects of a critical juncture that shape the initial outcomes that diverge across cases" (Soifer, 2012, pp. 1574-1575). In this framework, this chapter will evaluate the dynamics within secessionism on the eve of and following the referendum, the decision-making processes of party leaderships at critical junctures, and the divergent outcomes that result from them.

The literature on the (re-)formation of stateless nationalist party strategies has so far mostly focused on the influence of external factors (Gillespie, 2016). While our knowledge of the impact of internal factors is relatively limited, research on the interaction between internal and external factors, and their combination at critical junctures, remains even more scarce. This chapter argues that internal factors or agency play a decisive role in strategic shifts, but this is only possible during critical

junctures opened by permissive conditions. While the role of choice does not disappear entirely once the juncture closes, its effect becomes much narrower.

Considering our two cases within this perspective, we see that the impact of internal variances in Catalonia was much more decisive compared to Scotland. Catalonia entered the independence referendum process at a time when the CDC was weakening, and the ERC and CUP were rising, allowing them to have a significant influence on the decision-making process. In addition to these three parties, pro-independence social movements and formations emerged almost as a fourth actor, thus having a considerable impact on the development of the process and the decisions made by the parties. Moreover, differences within the CDC leadership became more visible during this period, leading to significant divisions between moderate and radical factions.

In Scotland, the SNP held a hegemonic position within secessionism. This situation provided the SNP with a much broader maneuvering space compared to CDC, particularly in managing relations with the center and setting the secessionist agenda. However, in the face of the SNP's weakness in the grassroots movement, the activities of parties with strength and experience in social movements, such as the SSP and the Greens, as well as social movements established autonomously from the SNP, played an important role in the extraordinary increase in popular support for independence. Unlike CDC, the SNP's main political struggle was against Scottish Labour, which led the unionist camp. At the same time, because Scotland, unlike Catalonia, could hold a bilateral, binding referendum, the main focus of the debate was on economic and social themes rather than democratic and national rights issues. In the economic case, the decisions made by the SNP leadership became one of the determining factors in shaping the referendum outcome.

In this framework, this chapter first examines whether independence is truly a radical strategy and how the CDC and SNP leaderships interpret radicalism. Following this, it analyzes the alternative conceptions of independence within secessionism and how these different comprehensions intersect and diverge during secessionist mobilization. Then, it explores how secessionist leaderships attempt to strike a balance between rupture and bargaining with the central government, and how this affects the very content of independence. Finally, it demonstrates the impact of specific decisions made by secessionist leaders during critical junctures in both cases, particularly on the closure of these junctures and the outcomes that emerged.

8.1 Framing secessionism: Radical “means” for “moderate” ends

In Chapter 2, I discussed the debate in the literature on where secessionism sits on the continuum of radicalism and moderation. I examined that, while secessionism is often equated with radicalism, it is not a constant or homogeneous phenomenon and can change over time. In the cases of the SNP and CDC, I argued that radicalization does not define the nature of the independent state they aim to establish but rather describes the concrete initiatives undertaken—through referendums—toward achieving this goal. The previous chapters explored the evolution of this process up to the eve of the referendum, addressing various dimensions. This section delves into how the SNP and CDC leadership perceive the relationship between radicalism and independence. Understanding this aspect will shed light on both the strategic actions of these parties and the tensions they experience with other factions within secessionism. In this context, the first illuminating example is Artur Mas’s perspective on the matter. He opposes labeling the process as a radicalization in terms of Catalan nationalism:

You might think that the will of many Catalans to become an independent country is a radical position. But it is not so much. I believe that this has two foundations. First, the conclusion that within Spain, Catalonia will not have strong self-government because Spain is undergoing a process of recentralization. Second, Catalonia wants to be a normal country within the EU. A normal country in the EU is not 100% independent. A country must cede sovereignty to Europe. And we, many Catalans, have come to the conclusion that it is better to cede sovereignty to Europe than to Madrid. This is the important conclusion. It's not about isolating ourselves, it's not about radicalizing. It's about being like Austria, or Denmark, or Finland, or Belgium. These are countries with more or less the same population as ours, and they are independent, sovereign, but they have ceded some sovereignty to European institutions. This is our model. (Author Interview with Mas, 9.1.2023)

Two points stand out in Mas's statement. The first relates to the center-periphery relationship. As we saw in Chapter 5, he views the central government's process of recentralization as the core issue of the territorial conflict. Therefore, he claims that it is not Catalonia that is radicalizing. Similarly, Josep Pagès, a constitutionalist at the UAB, former ERC activist, and national deputy for Junts, criticized the way PP and other majority parties frame constitutionalism:

What is important in Spain is what Carl Schmitt theorized: the constitution in a strong sense, the constitution in an identitarian sense. When they claim to be the constitutionalists, it is not true. We Catalan independentists are constitutionalists, because we defend the separation of powers and fundamental rights. They are constitutionalists in the Schmittian sense. (Author Interview with Pagès, 5.6.2022)

Thus, both Mas and Pagès point out that the main factor in the transformation of Catalan nationalism is the fact that Spanish nationalists have begun to act against the spirit of decentralization in the 1978 Constitution, and in this sense, it was the center that became radicalized.

The other key point in Mas's speech concerns the concept of sovereignty. Mas argues that absolute sovereignty is not possible, and that the preferred entity with which they choose to share sovereignty is the European Union, rather than the Spanish state, which "does not treat them well." Indeed, with the development of

multilevel governance, the classical notion of sovereignty has begun to be questioned, and in this context, it plays an important role in the debates on independence. In the period that Keating (2001) defines as “post-sovereignty,” the CDC and SNP leaders do not see sovereignty as something one and indivisible, like Bodin did, but rather as a relationship that can be shared (see Keating, 2012). Similarly, constitutional scholar Neil MacCormick (1999), who was influential on framing the SNP's territorial strategy, also emphasizes the concept of shared and divided sovereignty, particularly highlighting the role of the European Union. Stephen Noon, a long-time political advisor to the SNP chairman and the chief strategist of the Yes Campaign during the referendum process, summarizes this understanding in a way quite similar to Mas:

[W]e were very comfortable intellectually with this idea of, and ultimately sovereign in Scotland, an independent country like Denmark or Ireland or whatever it would be, but with the capacity then to choose to share sovereignty, the whole intellectual direction of the travel of the party was to that place of just comfort with the belief in shared sovereignty. Absolutely, it would have an electoral advantage to us to make people, to give people comfort around things like the social union, continuing the monarchy, continuing the Sterling. But there was also a genuine, intellectual comfort with it as well. (Author Interview with Noon, 19.2.2024)

Both Mas and Noon emphasize in their statements that the independent state their parties aim to establish will be a "normal" country, just like other already existing small nations. However, the fact that breaking away from an existing state is inherently a radical phenomenon remains on the table. Precisely for this reason, for example, the SNP presents independence as the final stage of an incremental process of devolution, which would not cause any political upheaval. In Catalonia, where tensions with the central government, which does not permit an independence referendum, are decisive, Artur Mas acknowledges this tension between means and ends and adds the following to his statement:

That being said, it is evident that this [independence] can be proposed at a theoretical level, and steps can be taken in practice to move toward it, but as of today, it has been shown that, under the circumstances surrounding us, it is enormously complex. Regardless of the fact that not everything within the Catalan sovereigntist movement is done well, which further complicates things. (Author Interview with Mas, 9.1.2023)

This contradiction between necessary "radical" means and desirable "normal" ends becomes much more visible in the interaction and debates within secessionism, where different conceptions of independence also exist. The next section will focus on the interplay of these different visions and strategies through empirical examples.

8.2 Unity and confrontation within secessionism

I already pointed out in the literature review and in the previous section that not only stateless nationalism but also secessionism is heterogeneous. This heterogeneity primarily stems from different positions toward what independence means, the means to achieve it, and other issue dimensions, particularly the socioeconomic one. These differences may express themselves in distinct political parties, social movements, or various factions within the same party. Especially in parties like the SNP and CDC, which present themselves as a "broad church" and claim to unite different tendencies within nationalism.

While these differences may be relatively peaceful and "sustainable" in "normal" times in politics, they can become more conflictual during "turbulent" times, and in such moments, the likelihood increases that a relatively small tendency may quickly grow or the opposite may occur (Rovny & Whitefield, 2019). In the previous chapters, I already examined the different tendencies and their evolution in both stateless nationalism as well as in the SNP and CDC. In this section, I will focus on these differences during the critical juncture on the eve of the referendum and how they influenced party strategies and decision-making processes.

Another important aspect to note here is that at critical junctures, while differences within secessionism tend to sharpen, the need for unity and alliances against the central state also increases significantly. Therefore, while different tendencies engage in an inner struggle for hegemony and power, they must also be more united than ever in pursuing the goal of independence against the central state. This contradictory situation makes the parties' strategic behavior and decision-making processes even more complex and dynamic. Within this framework, I will first examine the case of Catalonia, followed by Scotland.

8.2.1 Catalonia: A divided and disharmonious leadership

*“When the dispute between the pro-independence parties is at this level,
then independence is impossible.”*
Artur Mas

One of the key factors that marked the independence bid in Catalonia was the divided and disharmonious character of the secessionist leadership. This made coherent strategic planning and decision-making extremely difficult. Each new challenge deepened the distrust within the leadership, making it even more exhausting to act in unison. However, the weight and responsibility of the shared goal of pursuing de facto independence referendum prevented any one side from ending the secessionist alliance. Thus, the “unhappy alliance” of the secessionists continued with all its internal conflicts until the *Procès* came to a close.

The following dynamics determined the balance of power within secessionism: While the CDC, traditionally the hegemonic party of Catalanism, was gradually losing its strength, the ERC was on the rise and began to overtake the CDC in elections. Moreover, a new challenger, the radical left electoral platform CUP, emerged and was expanding its voter base. Additionally, secessionist social

formations with massive support and mobilization capacity, particularly the ANC, were exerting strong pressure on political parties, pushing for the acceleration of the independence attempt.

On the other hand, while tensions within secessionism were seeming more at the forefront, the unionist parties in Catalonia remained strong political actors even in their weakest conditions. For example, although the federalist and unionist PSC, for a long time the strongest party in Catalonia along with CiU, experienced a significant decline, much of the PSC's vote share shifted not to pro-independence parties but to the newly formed Podemos and C's, often referred to as populist left and populist right parties. C's adopted a position that was even more aggressively opposed to the Catalan nationalist movement than the PP. While Podemos claimed to defend Spain's plurinational character and the right of peoples to self-determination, in practice, it maintained a rather ambiguous stance on the national issue. Meanwhile, although a secessionist minority tendency had developed within ICV, the party majority continued to advocate for a federalist program. The leadership of the two strongest trade union confederations in Catalonia, Workers' Commissions (*Comisiones Obreras*, CC.OO) and Workers' General Union (*Unión General de Trabajadores*, UGT), were also against independence. Thus, although unionism, ranging from federalism to outright Spanish nationalism, was much more fragmented and divided compared to secessionism, it continued to represent almost half of Catalan society.

In this challenging context, the first major test for secessionism, and specifically for the CDC leadership, was the 9-N 2014 consultation. Despite all the obstacles posed by the PP government, the fact that 9-N took place was with the participation around 2.3 million people, on the one hand, a significant achievement.

On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter 5, its realization as a completely symbolic "popular mobilization" under the form of a "participatory process" was not aligned with the popular expectations created by the Mas administration's promise of an independence referendum. This also led to serious disagreements among the secessionist actors.

One of the main damages left by 9-N was the increasing distrust and tension between CDC leader Mas and ERC leader Junqueras. Junqueras did not believe that CDC's turn toward secessionism was genuine; he saw it as a *tacticismo* to remain in power. He also viewed Mas's decision to shift the organization of 9-N from the institutional framework of the Generalitat to a "participatory process" led by civil society organizations as proof of this intention (Garcia, 2018). Meanwhile, Mas and the CDC leadership suspected that ERC's real intention was not independence but to become the hegemonic force within Catalanism (Mas, 2020). While ERC was demanding radical steps from the CDC, it refused to join the government and share responsibility, meaning that all potential legal and criminal repercussions remained on the shoulders of the CDC leadership (Author Interview with Mas, 2024). Despite all these handicaps, the fact that 9-N took place with massive participation and created a victorious mood within the secessionist movement was something Artur Mas wanted to turn into an opportunity to shift the balance of power with the central government. As he had already stated before 9-N, if the PP government refused to allow an independence referendum, the CDC's proposal was to turn the next Catalan parliamentary elections into a "plebiscite" on independence (Mas, 2020). In this context, Mas's proposal to all pro-independence parties, particularly ERC, was to run in the elections with a joint list. Moreover, this list should include not only political parties but also representatives from civil society and prominent public figures. Such

a joint list, which would secure an absolute majority in parliament, would prepare state structures within a maximum of 18 months, negotiate with the central government and the European Union, and, at the end of this term, hold constituent elections followed by a referendum to officially declare the new Catalan state. To capitalize on the positive momentum created by 9-N, Mas called for a swift decision on the joint list and plebiscitary elections. Additionally, as a sign of his sincerity, Mas emphasized that he did not condition his proposal on leading the joint list:

He who asks for generosity from others must be the first to apply it to himself, and for this reason I want to make two commitments: if I head the united list and it wins, I will not run again in the following elections, and I can head the list, but I can also close it. (Mas, cited in Gisbert, 2014c)

However, following the negative experience during the 9-N process, the ERC leadership did not find Mas's proposal sincere and positive. From the perspective of ERC, which for the first time had finished ahead of CiU in the European Parliament elections in May 2014, Mas's offer seemed like a formulation to prevent CiU from facing another electoral defeat (Garcia, 2018; Mas, 2020).

Junqueras criticized Mas's roadmap on two levels, one strategic and the other tactical, while presenting his own proposal. The strategic one related to how relations with the central government would be managed. Junqueras argued that what mattered was not just the "declaration" of independence but its actual implementation. He maintained that the new secessionist government should, from the very beginning, take steps to initiate the break from the Spanish state. He emphasized that negotiations would only be meaningful if they were between two equal partners, and he advocated that the new government should plan a judicial transition process and gradually break away from Spain's legal framework (Tort, 2014). Therefore, in terms of relations with the center, Junqueras proposed a more confrontational and radical approach compared to Mas's roadmap.

In terms of political tactics, while Junqueras agreed with Mas that the elections should be held without delay, he rejected Mas's proposal for a joint list. Instead, the ERC leader put forward the formula of creating a common program for the secessionists, running separately in the elections, and then forming a joint government afterward. Junqueras justified this proposal by citing the deep differences between ERC and CDC regarding social and economic issues, as well as the corruption scandals surrounding the CDC: “It would be a betrayal to leave the banner of social justice and the fight against corruption in the hands of those who do not want the independence of our country.” (Tort, 2014)

Due to the tension between the two parties and the different roadmaps they proposed, the independence process was on the verge of a deadlock. To resolve the stalemate between the two parties, secessionist civic organizations intervened and effectively played a mediating role. As a result of these efforts, the CDC and ERC reached an agreement on March 30, 2015. According to this agreement, the parties would run separately in the elections but with a common program. This joint program, titled the “Unitary Roadmap for the Catalan Sovereignty Process,” was signed by the CDC, ERC, and the three main civic organizations of secessionism: ANC, Òmnium, and AMI. Within this framework, the parties agreed to hold elections on September 27, 2015, affirming that the elections would have a “plebiscitary” character. If the secessionists secured an absolute majority in the parliament, they confirmed that they would prepare the necessary steps to establish an independent Catalan state within an 18-month period. (“CDC, ERC, ANC”, 2015).

The other secessionist party represented in the Catalan parliament, CUP, rejected the joint list proposal, finding the CDC and ERC's program insufficient and ambiguous, and instead presented its own roadmap aimed at a “social and national

rupture.” In its statement, CUP emphasized that what is decisive is "the unequivocal programmatic and political commitment to independence and the end of austerity." ("Ruptura nacional y social", 2015)

The period from 9-N until the decision to call early elections and announce a joint independence program already reveals the deep mistrust and discord between CDC and ERC, as well as the difficulties they face in acting together. On the other hand, it shows that the civic organizations played both a pressure group on the political parties as well as a mediator role between them. Moreover, it points to the rise of CUP as a third autonomous force within secessionism. What made this picture even more challenging was the fact that 2015 turned into an election year with the announcement of the Catalan parliamentary elections for September 2015; considering the fact the local election would be held in May and the general elections in December. Starting from local elections, the electoral year made the Catalan party system even more fragmented and polarized as a whole and increased the dynamics of competition and conflict within secessionism. In this context, the May 2015 local elections were an important milestone in redefining the balance of power within secessionism and shaping the *Procès*. Therefore, in the next subsection, I will examine the period from the analysis of the May 2015 elections up until the formation of the new secessionist government.

8.2.2 Catalonia: From local elections to new secessionist government

May 2015 local elections resulted in many surprises and represented a new turning point in the upheaval of the Catalan party system. First, CiU, which had fallen behind ERC in the May 2014 European Parliament elections, managed to become the leading party in Catalonia this time, achieving a remarkable comeback. However,

despite this victory, there were significant losses compared to the previous local elections. CiU lost more than 500 seats in local councils and, most importantly, narrowly lost the Barcelona mayoralty. The winner of the elections in Barcelona was the newly formed left-wing electoral alliance, Barcelona in Common (*Barcelona en Comú*, BComú,).

BComú was founded as a political formation under the leadership of activists from social movements such as Indignados and Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (*Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*, PAH). BComú nominated Ada Colau, one of the leaders of PAH, for mayor of Barcelona, and the movement evolved into an electoral alliance, which included left parties like ICV and Podemos. BComú won 11 city council seats compared to CiU's 10, and with the support of ERC, PSC, and CUP, Ada Colau was elected as the mayor of Barcelona in the city council vote.

Table 10. Local Election Results in Catalonia (2003-2023)

Year	PSC	CiU/ Junts	ERC	ICV/ Bcomú	PP	C's	CUP	Turn out
2003	33.8	24.2	12.7	10.3	11.1	-	-	61.5
2007	32	25.1	11.6	8.9	9.8	2.3	0.7	53.9
2011	24.7	26.7	8.8	8.3	12.5	1.2	2.1	55
2015	16.9	21.4	16.2	11.9	7.5	7.4	7.6	58.5
2019	21.9	15.4	23.5	8.7	3.1	5.5	5.1	64.8
2023	23.7	18.4	17.3	8.9	8.2	1.2	4.4	55.6

Source El Departament d'Estadística i Difusió de Dades

The local election results reshaped the balance of power in both the secessionist and unionist camps. CiU's victory with 21.5% of the vote, about 5 points ahead of ERC, allowed the CDC to regain the initiative within secessionism ahead of the critical Catalan parliamentary elections in September. On the other hand, CUP's vote share rising above 7%, and its increase in both votes and the number of municipal

councilors by about 3.5 times compared to the previous local elections, proved that CUP had now become a third key actor within secessionism and would hold a crucial position in the September elections.

The two big losers of these elections, in parallel with their declines across Spain, were PSC and PP. Although PSC finished in second place ahead of ERC, it had lost around 200 thousands votes compared to the 2011 elections, and in its historical stronghold of Barcelona, its vote share fell below 10%, making it the fifth most-voted party. PP also experienced a drop of around 5%, resulting in one of the worst local election results in its history. In contrast, C's made a significant breakthrough with 7.5% of the vote, and the left-wing formations, collectively referred to as Entesa, which included BComú, Podemos, and ICV, gained a total of 11.8%. This overall picture not only demonstrated the deepening fragmentation of the Catalan party system but also highlighted the continued importance of the left-right cleavage in the midst of the territorial crisis. The fact that ERC and CUP supported BComú's candidate instead of CiU's in the Barcelona mayoral election underscored the fluidity of alliances.

Another important aspect of these local elections was that the CiU brand appeared on the ballots for the last time. The CDC's evolution from sovereigntism to secessionism and its decision to form a joint electoral alliance with other secessionist parties marked a turning point in the relationship between the CiU federation's partners. The UDC leadership opposed a unilateral independence initiative and instead advocated for continuing negotiations with the central government to achieve Catalonia's sovereignty. Therefore, UDC did not sign the roadmap on March 30. However, there was a severe split both within the leadership and the base of UDC. A substantial part of the party argued that UDC should also be part of the secessionist

process. To resolve this debate, UDC held an internal consultation on June 14, 2015, asking the question: “Do you want Unió to continue its commitment to the process, from an inclusive Catalanism and in accordance with the following criteria (sovereignty, democracy, dialogue, legal security, Europe, and cohesion)?” A Yes response meant the continuation of UDC's current policy, while a No response indicated forming an alliance with other secessionist parties. (“La pregunta de Unió”, 2015)

In the consultation, in which 64.8% of party members, or 2,654 people, voted, the Yes votes won by only 125 votes, with a majority of 50.9% (Gisbert, 2015). This result indicated that UDC was effectively split in half regarding its territorial strategy. Following this outcome, on June 18, CDC and UDC announced the dissolution of CiU, while the pro-independence faction within UDC immediately broke away to form a new party, Democrats of Catalonia (*Demòcrates de Catalunya*, DC), and joined the secessionist alliance (Mumbrú & Rodríguez, 2016).

Table 11. Ideological Positions of Catalan Nationalist Parties in September 2015

	CDC	ERC	CUP	UDC	DC
Territory	Secessionist	Secessionist	Secessionist	Autonomist/ Sovereigntist	Secessionist
Means	Institutions, Negotiation	Blurry	Civil disobedience, Rupture	Institutions, Negotiation	Institutions, Negotiation
Left- Right	Liberal	Social democrat	Anticapitalist	Christian Democrat	Christian Democrat
European Union	Pro-	Pro-	Against	Pro-	Pro-

In assessing the post-9-N period, so far I examined inter-party relations and tensions. The dissolution of CiU and the split within UDC are important in revealing both the intra-party effects of the secessionist process and how the intra-party developments also impact the latter. Moreover, the fact that CiU came to an end after an electoral

victory highlights the depth of strategic divisions within the federation. This situation aligns with the observations made by Elias and Mee (2017, p. 136): “This is because political parties are rarely homogenous actors, but are composed of different coalitions of actors with different priorities; the balance of power between these competing power bases influences the strategic direction a political party takes.” (See also Toubeau & Massetti, 2013)

With relations with UDC concluded and having emerged stronger from the elections, the CDC leadership’s main focus was now on the September 2015 elections. With the confidence of being the leading party in the elections, President Mas decided to call on the ERC and other secessionist components to once again enter the elections with a joint list: “We were heading into elections separately, where we would compete to come in first, and the tensions between us would increase. Frankly, I didn't see it as feasible.” (Mas, 2020)

As a result of renewed negotiations between the secessionist entities, this time, surprisingly, Junqueras and the ERC leadership responded positively to Mas's call. Thus, about two months before the elections, the details of the joint list began to be finalized. The first-ranked candidates in Catalonia's four electoral districts would be independent figures, with Mas as the president of the new government and Junqueras as the vice president. In addition to the independents, 58 percent of the electoral list would consist of the CDC and 42 percent of the ERC (Mas, 2020). The list, named *Junts pel Sí*, also included DC and The Left Movement (*Moviment d'Esquerres*, MES), which had split from PSC.

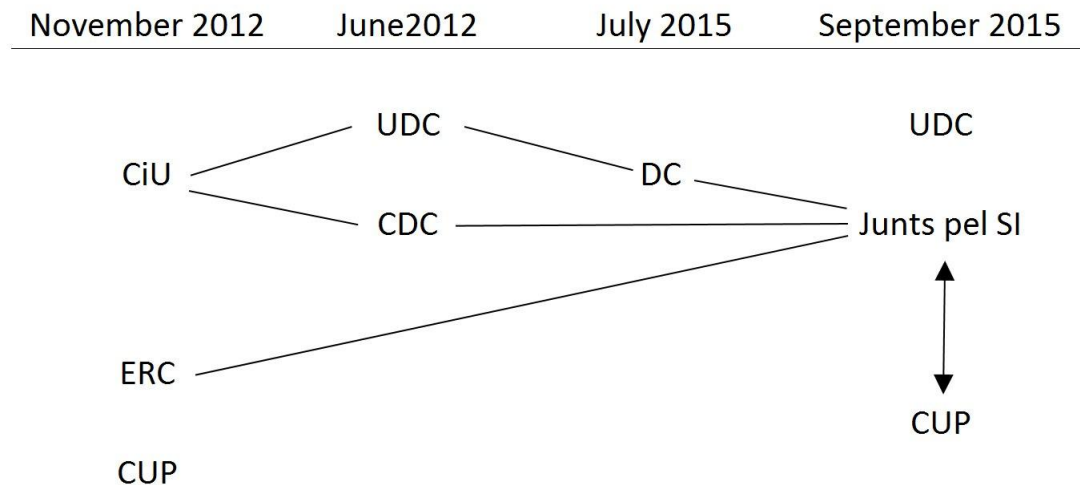


Figure 15. Alliances and splits within Catalan nationalist parties between 2012 and 2015

The only secessionist party that remained outside the joint list was the CUP. Having emerged stronger from the local elections and faced with significant pressure from civic organizations to join the joint list, the CUP ultimately decided to run separately in the elections. As an anti-capitalist organization, the CUP insisted that the socio-economic and national demands of the working classes of Catalonia are inseparable. To achieve independence and the unification of *Països Catalans* (Catalan Countries), there must be a break with the Spanish state and capitalism, as well as with the European Union, which serves the interests of banks and capital (CUP, 2015). During the election campaign, the CUP also pledged not to endorse Mas's presidency (Barberà, 2017).

After a highly polarized pre-election process between pro-independence and unionist parties, the secessionists secured a majority in parliament but fell short of winning a majority of the popular vote. In the pro-independence camp, JxSí obtained 39.6% of the vote and 62 seats, while the CUP secured 8.2% of the vote and ten seats. With a turnout of 75%, the highest ever in Catalan parliamentary elections, these two secessionist electoral lists collectively held 72 seats out of 135 and accounted for 47.9% of the popular vote. On the other hand, the results were not

promising for the unionist camp either. The PSC and PP continued to lose votes in these elections, while C's, compared to the 2012 Catalan parliamentary elections, increased its vote share by a remarkable 10.3%, becoming the largest party in the unionist camp. The total vote share of these parties, which opposed both independence and the holding of an independence referendum, was 39.1%.

Table 12. Election Results in Catalonia by Vote and Vote Percentage in 2012 and 2015

Party	Votes 2015	Votes 2012	Vote % 2015	Vote % 2012	Vote % +/-
JxS	1 628 714	1 614 383	39.59	44.41	-4.82
CiU ^a	-	1 116 259	-	30.71	-
ERC	-	498 124	-	13.70	-
C's	736 364	275 007	17.90	7.57	+10.33
PSC	523 283	524 707	12.72	14.43	-1.71
CSQEP (ICV) ^b	367 613	359 705	8.94	9.90	-0.96
PP	349 193	471 681	8.49	12.98	-4.49
CUP	337 794	126 435	8.21	3.48	+4.73
UDC	103 293	-	2.51	-	+2.51
Others	46 095	210 904	1.12	5.77	-4.65
Turnout	4 130 196	3 668 310	74.95	67.76	+7.19

Source: Martí and Cetrà, 2016

Between these two camps, there was a third camp that did not advocate for independence but also did not categorically reject it, and supported the holding of an independence referendum (Martí & Cetrà, 2016). One sector of this camp was formed by ICV, Podemos, and other left-wing parties. This group participated in the elections under the banner Catalonia Yes We Can (*Catalunya Sí Que Es Pot*, CSQEP) and obtained 8.9% of the vote. Another party that could be counted within this camp was UDC, which, after the dissolution of CiU, ran for the first time under its own name and received 2.5% of the vote. The total vote share of this third camp reached 11.5% (Blanco, 2016, p. 26).

Thus, this "plebiscitary" election, in which the secessionists achieved an absolute majority in the parliament but did not surpass the 50% threshold, created a new and contradictory political situation in Catalonia. Before the elections, Mas's plan was as follows:

If the parties supporting the 'yes' to independence did not accumulate more than 50% of the votes but achieved an absolute majority in the Parliament, they had the right to continue the *Procès*, but without completing it. And if they lost and did not achieve a majority, the issue of independence would be set aside. (Mas, 2020)

Therefore, according to Mas, after these results the *Procès* should continue, but since the 50% majority was not achieved, the final decision to break away from Spain should be evaluated not by this parliament but after the next elections. However, the election results once again shifted the balance of power within the secessionists, and new challenges emerged for the progress of the *Procès*. The JxSí coalition reached a vote share and number of seats that were less than the total obtained by CiU and ERC in 2012. In 2012, the two parties managed to secure an absolute majority in the 135-seat parliament with 71 deputies, but after the 2015 elections, they lost this advantage, holding only 62 seats. In contrast, CUP experienced a historic increase in votes, obtaining 10 deputies and becoming the "king-maker" in parliament. As a result, the Mas administration, which had called early elections in 2012 aiming to achieve an absolute majority in parliament, and contrary to expectations became dependent on ERC's parliamentary support, now found itself reliant not only on ERC but also on CUP's parliamentary backing.

The election results indicated a complex picture where there would now be three, not two, decisive political actors involved in the progress of the *Procès*, creating an atmosphere that further strained and worsened the relationships within secessionism. Firstly, Junqueras and the ERC leadership viewed the results as a defeat and believed that the joint list tactic had greatly harmed ERC. Indeed, the huge increase in CUP's votes was partly due to some ERC voters who were uncomfortable with the alliance with the CDC, which they viewed as right-wing, and thus voted for CUP, which was both anti-capitalist and secessionist (Author

Interview with Joaquim Colominas, 21.06.2022). Mas, on the other hand, considered the CUP's electoral campaign as an opportunism that prioritized party interests, while the CDC and ERC, with their joint list, put party interests on the back burner. He also believed that the stance of the secessionist civic organizations, which called to vote for "either JxSí or CUP" rather than prioritizing JxSí, played a role in the results (Mas, 2020).

After the elections, disagreements within the secessionist camp began to surface right from the start. According to the agreement within JxSí, Mas would continue as the president of the new government. However, throughout the election campaign, CUP had emphasized that it would not endorse Mas's presidency. This contradiction led to a major impasse in forming the new government. According to Neus Munté, vice president of the Catalan government and CDC's executive secretary responsible for specialized policy committees at the time, some within the CDC leadership argued that cooperation with CUP would be impossible and that a new early election should be held. However, another group believed that calling early elections over such a disagreement would provoke voter backlash against the secessionist parties, potentially preventing them from securing a secessionist majority again (Author Interview with Neus Munté, 16.02.2023). At the same time, secessionist entities were pressuring CUP to back down. In fact, there were also differing views within CUP. As Guillem Fuster, a leader of *Poble Lliure* (Free People), one of the two main tendencies within CUP, explained, one faction argued that in order for the *Procès* to continue, they should back down on opposing Mas's presidency. Another faction, however, believed that Mas represented austerity and the autonomist period, saw him as complicit in the corruption scandals within the CDC, and viewed this issue as a red line (Author Interview with Fuster, 21.12.2022).

What made this conflict even more challenging was that CUP was not a conventional political party with a hierarchical party structure but rather an assembly-based electoral alliance. For example, in the CDC, party presidents had extensive powers in decision-making processes. Strategic decisions for the party were ultimately taken by Pujol for decades and later by Mas. Similarly, in the ERC, the Junqueras leadership held great respect within the party due to its electoral successes, and Junqueras and his close team played a decisive role in critical decision-making processes. CUP, on the other hand, was a political formation primarily composed of two secessionist radical left organizations, *Poble Lliure* (Free People) and *Endavant* (Forward), but also included activists who were not members of these two parties as part of its assemblies. Furthermore, in these elections, smaller independent radical left parties also ran under the *Crida Constituent* (Constituent Call) banner on CUP's lists. Members of these parties could also participate in CUP's assemblies.

Within this very complex structure, the CUP Political Council decided to convene a large assembly to determine its stance. On December 27, 2015, at the assembly held in Sabadell, the CUP base was initially asked four questions (see Table 10). Since no option received over 50% support in the first vote, a second round was held by eliminating the option with the fewest votes. When a similar situation arose in the second vote, a third round was conducted between two options. The CUP base was evenly split between the options of reaching an agreement with JxSí by endorsing Mas's presidency and rejecting these options to trigger new early elections. With these extremely rare results and after an exhausting voting process lasting over seven hours, no decision was reached by the assembly. In the words of a CUP member, "In the end, we decided that we didn't decide anything, to shit on the

third way" (in Tort, 2015). Thus, the assembly left the final decision to the CUP Political Council.

Table 13. Voting Results of the Extraordinary National Assembly of CUP (27 December 2015)

Options	1st Voting	2nd Voting	3rd Voting
Yes to the agreement with JxSí and the investiture of Mas.	1359 (45,17%)	1482 (48,71)	1515 (50%)
No to the agreement and the investiture of Mas and to assume new elections.	1418 (47,42%)	1512 (49,70)	1515 (50%)
No to the agreement with JxSí, but Yes to the investiture of Mas.	109 (3,62%)	28 (0,92)	--
No to the agreement and the investiture of Mas and urge JxSí to seek other pacts.	103 (3,42%)	--	--

Source: "El resultado" (2015)

The vote organized by the CUP, similar to the UDC consultation, but this time in a literal sense, resulted in a split of half and half. These two experiences are revealing in demonstrating the peak of intra-party heterogeneities and polarizations. In the case of CUP, this situation highlighted the tension between those who prioritized "national unity" or territorial dimension and those who prioritized "social issues" or socioeconomic dimension. Nevertheless, unlike UDC, CUP managed to continue its existence with all these tensions without experiencing a split.

Meanwhile, negotiations between the JxSí leadership and the CUP secretariat continued until January 9, the deadline for forming a government before the parliament would be automatically dissolved. On the final day, it was Artur Mas who stepped back in the negotiations. Instead of himself, Mas proposed Carles Puigdemont, the mayor of Girona, known for his pro-independence stance and also serving as the president of AMI. With all parties agreeing on Puigdemont's name, an early election was averted, and the JxSí government was formed with CUP's external support.

To sum up, in the year following 9-N, secessionism managed to stay afloat despite all challenges. For the first time in the post-Franco period, there was a Catalan government that openly advocated for independence and declared that it would make the necessary preparations to declare independence within 18 months, and if necessary, unilaterally. However, inter-party competition and intra-party differences prevented the emergence of coherent leadership and strategy to guide this challenging process. Thus, alongside the breakdown of negotiations with the central government and the situation caused by the economic crisis, confrontations within secessionism played a decisive role in the territorial strategy developed by the CDC leadership during this complex period. In light of these distinct dynamics, in the next sections, I will analyze the secessionist strategy of Puigdemont's administration, which became blurry between total rupture and bargaining. Before that, the upcoming subsection will focus on the shaping of intra-secessionism dynamics in Scotland and the reframing of the SNP's territorial strategy.

8.2.3 Scotland: SNP's hegemony with minor allies

In contrast to the dizzying complexity of Catalonia, Scotland may at first glance appear to be an "oasis of peace and tranquility." Indeed, while in Catalonia, the balance of power within secessionism, with differing strategies and priorities, eventually led the parties to "a compromise that satisfied no one," in Scotland, the SNP acted as a decisive force in strategic planning and in developing tactics and discourses aligned with that strategy. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, the advisory board of the Yes Campaign included, as a reflection of the campaign's plurality, not only the SNP but also the Scottish Greens and SSP, who were particularly strong in the grassroots movement in comparison to SNP. In addition to

inter-party differences, there were also various tendencies within the SNP regarding different policy issues. Hence, although the dominant tendency within secessionism was unity, these differences significantly influenced the debates during the referendum process and ultimately the outcome of the referendum. This section will examine the dynamics that these heterogeneities created within secessionism and their impact on the SNP's territorial strategy.

A distinctive feature of secessionism in Scotland is that all three pro-independence political parties are positioned on the left. We have already seen that while the SNP includes both liberal-centrist and hard-left elements, its main orientation is social democratic center-left. The other two parties represented in Yes Scotland are positioned to the left of the SNP. The Scottish Greens have a program that fluctuates between the center-left and left-wing policies, while the SSP is a clearly radical left, Trotskyist party. This scenario highlights an evident difference from Catalonia, where a key aspect of the confrontational nature of secessionism is the ideological diversity of the leading parties. In Scotland, by contrast, the common left identity of all three parties, although positioned at different points on the spectrum, served to limit internal conflict (della Porta et al., 2017, p. 71). Before analyzing the dynamics between these parties, it would be useful to briefly outline the political trajectories of the Scottish Greens and the SSP.

Table 14. Ideological Positions of Secessionist Parties/Entities in Scotland

	SNP	Scottish Greens	SSP	RIC
Territory	Secessionist	Secessionist	Secessionist	Secessionist
Means	Institutions, Negotiation	Negotiation, Civil disobedience	Civil disobedience, mobilizations	Civil disobedience, mobilizations
Left-Right	Center left	Left	Radical left	Radical left
NATO	Pro-NATO since 2012	Anti-NATO	Anti-NATO	Anti-NATO
European Union	Pro-EU	Pro-EU	Skeptical, Internationalist	Skeptical, Internationalist

The Scottish Green Party or the Scottish Greens were established in 1990 when the Scottish branch of the Green Party, which was originally founded across the UK in the late 1970s, became a separate party. Holyrood's additional member voting system, a form of proportional representation, provided an opportunity for the Greens and other small parties to gain parliamentary representation for the first time. In the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections, the Scottish Greens won their first seat, marking the first time the Greens secured a parliamentary seat anywhere in the UK (Dennison, 2017). In the 2003 elections, during a period when the SNP experienced a decline, the Scottish Greens achieved a surprising success by securing 7 seats. However, in the 2007 elections, when the SNP narrowly became the leading party, the Greens managed to win only two seats. During this period, the Greens provided external support to Alex Salmond's minority SNP government. In return, the SNP implemented some ecological policies in line with the Greens' demands. Nevertheless, tensions emerged between the two parties over various issues, particularly transportation policies (Bennie, 2019). The Scottish Greens maintained their two parliamentary seats in the 2011 elections, making them, alongside the SNP, the only pro-independence party continuously represented at Holyrood.

The Scottish Socialist Party was founded in 1998 as a radical left and secessionist party. The party's founding members came from the Trotskyist Militant tendency within the Labour Party. This faction played a significant role in the mass mobilizations against the Poll Tax in the late 1980s, and their organizational momentum led them to establish an independent political entity in the early 1990s, which eventually contributed to the founding of the SSP (Gall, 2012). In the 1999 Holyrood elections, the party's convener, Tommy Sheridan, was elected as a MSP from the Glasgow regional list. Sheridan's notable performance as an MSP, coupled with the SSP's leadership in mass mobilizations against the Iraq War and the conjunctural decline of both Scottish Labour and the SNP, contributed to the party winning six MSP seats in the 2003 elections. This was a historic victory for the SSP, which garnered over 15% of the vote in Glasgow, Scotland's biggest city and its working class heartland (Gibbs, 2019). However, shortly after this huge success, a conflict emerged between Sheridan, the party's most prominent figure, and the rest of the SSP leadership on personal and ethical issues, plunging the party into a severe crisis. This leadership crisis led to a split within the party, with Sheridan and his supporters forming a new party called Solidarity. In the 2007 elections, neither the SSP nor Solidarity managed to secure MSP seats. Sheridan narrowly missed being re-elected in Glasgow, and as Solidarity's influence waned over time, the SSP, although no longer represented in Parliament, overcame its internal crisis and remained active, particularly within grassroots movements.

In this configuration, it is not difficult to predict that the two parties, which share the goal of independence with the SNP, advocate for a more radical independence strategy and exert pressure on the SNP in this direction. In Chapter 6, I already demonstrated that on the eve of the referendum, the SNP faced a difficult

dilemma between options of moderation and radicalization, regarding the level of rupture from the United Kingdom, and in response to this challenge, the SNP leadership chose moderation. Thus, this moderation strategy was not an aspect agreed upon either within the SNP or more broadly within secessionism. Although the Salmond leadership, thanks to its authority within the party, managed to implement its strategy without an internal crisis, the process in which the meaning of independence was concretized to this extent for the first time also brought many debates and divisions.

In this context, the first major topic of debate was the stance on NATO. The SNP's change of its traditional anti-NATO position on the eve of the referendum was one of the first and most important steps towards moderation by the SNP leadership. To finalize this change in position, a party conference was held on October 19, 2012, just one week after the Edinburgh Agreement. The debate was quite tense and intense, and the SNP's pro-NATO stance was adopted by a narrow margin of 446 votes to 332. ("SNP members vote," 2012)

While the SNP's more moderate factions and the leadership saw this new stance as a positive development, many SNP members, including two anti-NATO MSPs, resigned from the party following the decision. Furthermore, this shift triggered the formation of the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), which organized autonomously from Yes Scotland. One of RIC's co-founders, James Foley, explained, "There were a lot of people who left the SNP during the referendum over NATO. That's how the Radical Independence Campaign formed, because it grew out of an anti-NATO campaign" (Author Interview with James Foley, 21.02.2024).

RIC was founded in November 2012 with a powerful event attended by over 900 participants, led by radical left activists and intellectuals (Sangha &

Jamieson, 2014). Mobilizing hundreds of activists around approximately 30 local groups, RIC worked in collaboration with Yes Scotland while maintaining an autonomous structure and a vision of independence quite distinct from that of the SNP (della Porta et al., 2017, pp. 81-82). In addition to militants of the SSP, Greens, and left-wing members of SNP, it also included many young and veteran left activists who were not members of any political party. In fact, RIC surprisingly transformed into a platform representing the radical left politics that the SSP once embodied.

Besides the NATO debate, another essential topic within secessionism was the currency issue. In Chapter 6, I mentioned the evolution of the SNP's currency policy, detailing how, in 2013, the decision was finalized to continue using the pound sterling after independence, and I covered Better Together's opposition to this policy. Since economic issues were at the forefront of the referendum campaign, in fact, the currency issue held the most critical significance (Liñeria et al., 2017). Secessionist parties other than the SNP and the RIC supported Scotland having its own currency. According to Patrick Harvie, leader of the Scottish Greens, “Many Scots yet to decide on independence may be unconvinced about voting Yes without the promise of true independence ... It is reasonable to expect our economic priorities to diverge from those of the rest of the UK, potentially making our own currency an unavoidable next step” (Gardham, 2013). Similarly, Colin Fox, spokesperson for the Scottish Socialist Party and member of Yes Scotland’s advisory board, argued that “economic independence cannot be achieved while monetary controls are applied in London” (Fox, 2014, p. 22).

Within the SNP, although no party conference was held on the issue (similar to the one on NATO) and the party leadership decided on the currency issue directly on the basis of the report prepared by the Fiscal Commission Working Group, it was

the issue that generated the most debate within the party before the referendum. For example, one of the party's former presidents, Gordon Wilson, and Jim Sillars, former SNP MP and one of the most prominent figures and leaders, publicly criticized the currency union policy, arguing that Scotland should have its own currency (Carrell, 2013). Swinney, who was then Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, also mentions that the currency issue was the most controversial topic within the party before the referendum:

There would be some people who would really rail against that, who would want Scotland to have, essentially, who would think the purpose of independence was for Scotland to have monetary and fiscal independence. And I understand that argument, and I would have to accept that if you operate in the type of monetary union that we proposed, there would be certain constraints on how a Scottish government could operate in the exercise of monetary policy, and it might have implications for fiscal policy as well. Although I would argue you would have fiscal levers that you don't have today that would allow you to counterbalance the effects of monetary policy. That was a live tension. (Author Interview with Swinney, 05.03.2024)

A similar positioning can be observed in the debate over the head of state. While the SNP advocated for maintaining the "union of Crowns" after independence, the Scottish Greens, SSP, and RIC argued that Scotland should be governed as a republic. Patrick Harvie from Scottish Greens, described the promise that an independent Scotland would continue to use the British pound and retain the Queen as head of state as a "strategy of failure" (Johnson, 2012). Colin Fox from the SSP, who refers to the monarchy as an "anachronism," draws attention to the "latent power" of the monarchy, which is often claimed to be limited to a ceremonial role:

On the one hand, we're told the Queen has no powers but is responsible for 50 years of political stability. We are advised hers is largely a ceremonial role, yet all our MPs and MSPs must swear an oath of allegiance to her. She is the head of our judiciary, the police and armed forces. The truth is, the monarchy has considerable latent power. The Queen appoints the Prime Minister, the powerful Privy Counsellors, bishops, judges, generals and lords. She is also the biggest landowner in Britain, with real estate worth billions, and where did she get it from if not from her 'subjects', the 'commoners'? (Fox, 2014, p. 36)

As mentioned earlier, the shared left-wing identity of all three parties (SNP, Greens, and SSP) has been a factor in calming internal confrontation dynamics. However, this does not change the fact that there are significant differences and debates among them regarding the socioeconomic dimension. While the SNP supports some social welfare policies, its general acceptance of the neoliberal paradigm, advocacy for a low corporate tax rate, and focus on "economic growth" are key areas of criticism from the SSP and Greens. According to an SSP activist, the SNP should not be defined as "social democratic" but rather as "social liberal":

Social democracy is interventionist. The state would intervene and it would change, put pressure on capitalists. The SNP don't do that. They privatize. The SNP privatized two hospitals in this city [Edinburgh]. They are a bourgeois nationalist party. Finance capital is very powerful in this country, and they have close links with finance capital. (Author Interview, 16.03.2024)

From a similar perspective, RIC members, who were disappointed with the SNP's "cautious approach," initiated to organize their own "aggressive" campaign. Distributing flyers and posters with the slogan "Britain is for the rich, Scotland can be ours" in poor working-class neighborhoods, RIC organizers viewed the referendum as a class conflict. According to them, "the rich are voting No to avoid radical change" and "they want to attract people who feel conventional politics is irrelevant to their lives, and who therefore 'have nothing to lose' by voting Yes" (Gordon, 2014b). Being in stark contrast to the SNP's "moderate", "positive" or "based on hope" image; the Conservatives described this campaign as "based on hatred" and Labour as "appalling", while the SNP declared that it was "organizationally separate" from its own activity (Gordon, 2014b).

Another aspect that distinguishes the SNP from the other two secessionist parties is its approach to nationalism. Similar to CDC and ERC, the SNP advocates for civic, inclusive nationalism that lacks any ethnic or racial dimension. The primary

reason for its support of independence is the belief that ultimate sovereignty resting in Scotland is the best solution for its people. As Alex Salmond put it, “I believe in independence because I believe it will be better for all of us if decisions about Scotland are taken by the people who care most about Scotland – the people who live and work here. It is my absolute conviction that Scotland’s future should be in Scotland’s hands” (Scottish Government, 2013, p. ix).

In contrast, the Scottish Greens and the SSP rejected nationalism as an ideology. For these parties, independence was a means to achieve their envisioned economic, social, and political order, rather than an end in itself. According to Patrick Harvie from the Scottish Greens, “for me, it’s got nothing to do with flags, or 300 years of history; it’s about the future. And I think that the best way, not only of changing Scotland, but actually challenging the nature of UK politics and the way that it works at present, throughout these islands, is Scottish independence” (Dennison, 2017, p. 51).

As for the SSP, ultimately advocating for a socialist world without national borders, supports Scotland's independence because it believes that separating from the United Kingdom would be a progressive step for the Scottish working class. According to this perspective, “For socialists, the key question is, will Scotland’s working class majority be better off with independence or not?” (Fox, 2014, p. 17). The party sees the British state as an imperialist, militarist, and reactionary structure. The SSP believes that breaking away from this state would improve the conditions for social reforms in Scotland and, in the long run, create a favorable environment for a socialist revolution:

Breaking free of the malevolent influence of the British state means that Scotland’s social democratic values will be unchained. That then is what the independence debate is essentially all about. It’s about ending low pay and under-employment and providing full employment, it’s about ending fuel

poverty, it's about eradicating child poverty, improving our infrastructure, health care, social care, education, opportunity. Independence is the key to the door. (Fox, 2014, pp. 19-20).

The difference in how the SNP, Greens, and SSP view nationalism and independence directly influences their territorial strategies. The SNP sees independence as an end in itself and aims to present a "credible" and "achievable" image of independence that would not alarm the middle classes or the "establishment." In contrast, the Greens and SSP view independence as a means to an end, framing it within a radical program designed to mobilize those who are disillusioned with the current political system—specifically, the poor and non-voters. Despite this fundamental difference, however, there has not been significant competition or conflict among the secessionist forces in Scotland, unlike in Catalonia. The primary reason for this lack of conflict is the SNP's hegemonic power within the secessionist movement. A Yes Scotland organizer from SNP comments on this situation as follows:

As the biggest party, as the government party, we reserve the right to sort of say what goes in the government policy, but we absolutely respect their right to put alternative views. So there was the wider Yes body and they were all absolutely free to set out their own visions on issues like currency, the monarchy, etcetera. And looking back, I don't really remember that being a particular problem, a difficulty sort of thing. (Author Interview, 21.03.2024)

Moreover, since the SNP did not perceive other parties and campaigns as a threat to its hegemony, it believed that multiple narratives would benefit the independence campaign. Stephen Noon, the chief strategist of the Yes Campaign, emphasizes this point by highlighting that the diversity of voices and perspectives within the independence movement was seen as an asset rather than a weakness:

You could have your socialist Republicans on one side out speaking to people who would be receptive to their message. And you'd have the business people over on this side connecting and speaking to their message. Overarching it all was the central message which was much more opportunity, possibility. We were able to deliver a very targeted campaign. People were able to say the thing that persuaded a particular group while also having this overarching message and narrative. (Author Interview with Noon, 19.02.2024)

In addition to the SNP's inclusive and tolerant approach that praised plurality, other parties also made efforts throughout the campaign to minimize internal differences.

Colin Fox, the leader of the SSP, summarizes this attitude as follows:

I was conscious throughout that if we lost the referendum, I didn't want the blame to be apportioned to the SSP for losing it, because "we'd divided the movement or chosen to make referendum, the republic question or class issues or whatever, and so undermined the unity of the Yes side". So that's what we did. We made sure that we didn't come out of the referendum with the blame for having lost that right. But the truth is, on the other side of the dialectic, it meant that the SSP paid a certain price for compromise. (Author Interview with Fox, 12.03.2024)

As a result of these factors and choices, secessionism managed to present a unified image despite its internal differences, which positively influenced the outcome of the referendum. Furthermore, despite the clear power imbalance between them and the SNP, as analyzed in Chapter 7, socialists and Greens played a significant role by reaching out to poor, working-class regions that were not within the SNP's sphere of influence, convincing them to vote. This effort was instrumental in increasing support for independence from around 30% at the start of the campaign to a point where it posed a serious challenge to the "No" vote in the final weeks of the campaign.

After examining the impact of internal dynamics within secessionism on the territorial strategies of CDC and SNP in Catalonia and Scotland, respectively, in the next section I will focus on the impact of the decisions made by party leaderships on the eve of the referendums.

8.3 Leadership and decision-making as causal forces

Leaders always make decisions under certain structural constraints. When mechanisms of reproduction are self-reinforcing, the outcomes of these decisions

usually become secondary in terms of institutional change. However, during critical junctures, when these constraints are loosened, agency or contingency may shape divergence from the past or across cases (Soifer, 2012, p. 1573). Indeed, leadership decisions might have causal relevance during critical junctures in various ways. Firstly, although permissive conditions may be present, without the active intervention of agency, a "missed opportunity" may occur, and change may not happen (Soifer, 2012, p. 1579). Secondly, critical junctures open up multiple potential paths for change, and ultimately, the choices made by agency determine the outcome. Thirdly, leaders' decisions and the outcomes they produce can lead to the closure of the critical juncture and the formation of a new equilibrium (path dependence).

In this section, taking into account the heterogeneity within secessionism, I will demonstrate how the decisions made by leaders had decisive impacts on how the critical junctures closed and the outcomes that emerged. I will focus on moments and decisions that influenced both the outcomes of territorial crises and how the parties' territorial strategies materialized during the critical juncture. In this context, I will first examine the consequences of government presidency change from Mas to Puigdemont in Catalonia, the refoundation of CDC, and the strategic choices of the Puigdemont administration throughout 2016 and 2017. I will then focus on the leadership decisions that shaped the SNP's independence strategy in Scotland and influenced the outcomes of the 2014 referendum.

8.3.1 From Mas to Puigdemont, CDC to PDeCAT

“Puigdemont is someone who is a member of the PDeCAT (former Convergència), thinks like he is from Esquerra, and acts as if he were from the CUP.”
Juan M. Marqués Perales, 2017

The fact that the newly formed secessionist government was led by Puigdemont instead of Mas marked a qualitative shift that would be decisive in the course of events. It is true that CDC's transformation from autonomism to secessionism began under Mas's leadership, a shift that even the party's former and historical leader, Jordi Pujol, supported (“Jordi Pujol afirma que”, 2012). On the other hand, Mas had been part of the party's political leadership for many years, assuming institutional responsibilities along the way. After gaining this experience, he became the head of CDC with Pujol's backing. In this regard, he represented the party's more conservative and elitist faction and was well versed in the intricacies of institutional politics. At the same time, Mas's presidency marked a generational shift within the party's leadership, as his close circle was ideologically more inclined towards sovereigntism from the outset. However, despite being the architect of the idea of holding plebiscitary elections with a secessionist roadmap, Mas was highly sensitive to the concerns of the "establishment" and, despite the radical nature of his strategy, "knew where to hit the brakes" (Garcia, 2018).

Compared to Mas, however, Puigdemont "is an idealistic and stubborn leader, a free spirit in politics, who went much further than his predecessor ever would have" (Garcia, 2018). From his youth, Puigdemont was a committed secessionist and a CDC militant, and his professional career was in journalism. His first political representation began in 2007 when he became a member of the Girona City Council, followed by his appointment as mayor of Girona in 2011. In 2015, he was elected president of AMI. His appointment as president of the Generalitat in 2016 was a

complete surprise to both himself and Catalan politics. When Artur Mas, faced with CUP's definitive veto against him, decided to "take a step aside" ("*pas al costat*") rather than call for early elections, his first choice for the presidency was Vice President Neus Munté (Martí, 2018, p. 6). After Munté's categorical refusal, Puigdemont became his second option. Puigdemont received the offer just one day before new elections would have been inevitable and had to respond on the same day (Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020). With Puigdemont's acceptance of the offer, early elections were averted, and with CUP's support, a secessionist government was formed. As a result, through a complex chain of coincidences, a more radical and "idealistic" character compared to Mas, Puigdemont became the 130th president of the Generalitat and this change became one of the key factors shaping the process.

Moreover, the unexpected transition of presidency from Mas to Puigdemont occurred amid a broader transformation process within CDC. In fact, the CDC leadership has been planning the refoundation of the party for some time. The primary reason for this was the corruption scandals that had severely damaged the party, and the legal cases initiated against it. Furthermore, the party had been in decline in elections since 2012. Additionally, the party's official stance underwent a notable evolution in recent years, transitioning from autonomism to secessionism. Faced with these challenges, the CDC leadership made the strategic decision to rebrand the party, introducing a new name, a fresh program, and updated statutes.

In the course of the refoundation process, the CDC leadership initiated a comprehensive discussion to ensure active participation from the party's grassroots. Following an initial congress process that deliberated on the new party's program, organizational structure, and name, the 17th Congress of the party occurred on May 21, 2016. During this congress, the majority of party members voted to dissolve the

CDC and formally establish the new party (Gisbert, 2016a). Subsequently, the congress for the newly formed party took place on July 8, 9, and 10, 2016. The congress endorsed the party's program, explicitly advocating Catalonia's independence. The party adopted a name *Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català* (Catalan European Democratic Party, PDeCAT)⁴⁹ and defined itself as democratic, Catalanist, independentist, Europeanist, humanist, and republican (Gisbert 2016b).

However, what marked the congress was not the political program but the debates surrounding the party's leadership structure and functioning. CDC was traditionally a party operating with a vertical hierarchy and extraordinary powers vested in the president. The party base and mid-level cadres were now questioning this system and demanding significant changes in the party's functioning to ensure genuine renewal. This tension between Mas's leadership and the party base was reflected at the congress, where reforms were adopted in favor of a more democratic and collective leadership structure (Garcia Pagan & Gisbert, 2016). Thus, the congress adopted a new statute that enhanced grassroots participation and decision-making authority, emphasizing transparency and gender representation as priorities. The new party was structured to ensure gender representation, with both a president and a vice president. Furthermore, these roles would not hold executive functions but would instead focus on "representation and coordination." Artur Mas and Neus Munté were elected as president and vice president, respectively, while still symbolizing the "old era." However, Marta Pascal, representing the party's younger generation, was elected as general coordinator, positioned as the party's third-ranking leader. This new leadership structure aimed to promote a more collective

⁴⁹ In fact, the congress decided on a new name as *Partit Demòcrata Català* (PDC). However, due to the similarity of the new name with *Demòcrates de Catalunya*, the Ministry of the Interior refused to register the party. As a result, the new party finalized its name as *Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català* (PDeCAT) in September 2016.

approach, increase women's representation, and ensure a balanced inclusion of the party's various factions (Gisbert, 2016c). Thus, armed with a renewed name, program, and structure, the *Convergents* advanced toward the secessionist road map, facing the most significant challenge in the movement's history.

8.3.2 From DUI to RUI⁵⁰

“The autonomists have had forty years to try. The independentists have only been trying for a few weeks. Let us try.”
Carles Puigdemont

The formation of the secessionist government was based on a last-minute agreement between CDC and CUP. In this agreement, Mas agreed to step down from the presidency, while CUP committed to ensuring parliamentary stability for the JxSí government. The text of the agreement included CUP's explicit self-criticism regarding its stance during the negotiations, the allocation of two deputies to the JxSí parliamentary group, and a guarantee not to vote with other parliamentary groups opposed to the sovereigntist process, ensuring parliamentary stability (Garcia Pagan, 2016).

Nevertheless, the disparities between the coalition government and CUP surfaced soon after, leading to a crisis during the 2017 budget negotiations. The CUP criticized the budget proposed by JxSí, contending that, firstly, it failed to align with the imperatives of the independence process and succumbed to the impositions of the Spanish state. Secondly, it was insufficiently oriented toward social concerns, appearing more tailored to the demands of financial markets (Alcolea, 2016).

⁵⁰ DUI is the synonym of *Declaración Unilateral de Independencia* (Unilateral Declaration of Independence). RUI is the synonym of *Referendum Unilateral de Independencia* (Unilateral Referendum of Independence)

The CUP's announcement that it would not approve the government budget in its current form was totally unexpected for the JxSí government. According to the CDC leadership, the CUP's stance meant that it was breaking the agreement and not keeping its word. Artur Mas comments ironically on this situation as follows:

Then they used a very unique expression, saying that instead of admitting they had deceived the people, or me, or outsiders, they said that "agreements mutate." "Mutate" means that they evolve or change, like a bird flying through the air from one nest to another. So, agreements mutate. This means that the word given and the signature of the CUP are worth nothing. That's the conclusion. Because they are mutants. The word mutates, and that's also a commitment. (Author Interview with Artur Mas, 09.01.2023)

Dispute over government budget between JxSí and CUP led to a new political crisis just a few months after the formation of the JxSí government, in June 2016. A faction within the CDC leadership believed that calling for early elections was necessary to break free from dependency on CUP and abandon the unilateral roadmap (Garcia, 2018). Meanwhile, ERC was open to early elections, as polls indicated it could emerge as the leading party (Casas et al., 2020, p. 39). CUP, on the other hand, doubted the JxSí government's commitment to independence, suspecting that it would not pursue a unilateral rupture. To resolve this deadlock, Puigdemont decided to initiate direct negotiations with the CUP leadership. Puigdemont's plan, as explained in Chapter 5, was to revise the secessionist roadmap by holding a binding independence referendum within the current legislative term, and, if rejected by the Spanish government, proceed unilaterally. This approach aimed to resolve the legitimacy issue stemming from the 47.9% vote share in the September 2015 elections and to convince CUP that the government was serious and committed to the independence roadmap. In return, CUP would approve the government budget, and Puigdemont would submit his government to a vote of confidence in parliament in

September 2016, reaffirming the commitment of all secessionist forces to the process. (Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020)

While negotiating the roadmap revision with CUP, Puigdemont had neither sought approval from his government members nor from the party leadership. Since the formation of the new government, the necessity of a referendum had remained a topic of debate within the secessionist movement, but there was no consensus on the matter. After reaching an agreement with CUP leaders on September 2, Puigdemont started formally discussing the issue with the party leadership and the government. However, the discussions with PDeCAT leaders on September 5 did not lead to a consensus. Artur Mas was among the strongest opponents of the idea of holding a new referendum (Casas et al., 2020, pp. 23-24). Mas had two fundamental objections to this idea. The first was his belief that the Spanish state would never allow a binding, bilateral referendum under the circumstances of the Rajoy government continuing after 9-N (Mas, 2020). While the Spanish state had no right to block “plebiscitary” Catalan parliamentary elections, it did have the power to block unilateral referendums. Secondly, voter turnout in official elections was significantly higher compared to informal referendums:

In elections, far more people vote, and therefore the picture that emerges from elections is more accurate than the one that comes from a referendum, where only about 40% of people participate. Consider that in 2015, the turnout in the Catalan parliamentary elections was 75%, not 40%. ... The problem with sovereignty consultations is that only 40% participate, which is significant in historical terms, but in terms of a real picture of a country, it is not sufficient." (Author Interview with Mas, 09.01.2023)

After the PDeCAT leaders failed to reach a decisive conclusion on September 5, Puigdemont raised the issue again at the government meeting on September 20. The majority of ex-CDC ministers expressed opposition to a unilateral referendum, while the ERC ministers supported the proposal (Garcia, 2018). Overall, no consensus

emerged from either the PDeCAT leadership or the government meeting regarding the revision. However, Puigdemont was determined in his proposal, and the title of his speech at the parliamentary confidence vote on September 28 was "Either a referendum or a referendum." PDeCAT leaders, who were unconvinced by the proposed revision, decided to support Puigdemont's decision to avoid triggering a new crisis. They believed that, if the process completely derailed, the call for early elections might allow the government and party leaders to avoid severe legal consequences. Meanwhile, Junqueras and ERC leaders suspected that Puigdemont's party was not genuinely committed to organizing the RUI and viewed the proposal as a maneuver intended to put ERC in a difficult position. However, to avoid creating the impression that they were the ones stepping back, they also decided to support the proposal (Casas et al. 2020, p. 31). CUP was the most satisfied with this situation. They believed that the decision to hold the RUI would have binding effects on the JxSí government and would narrow the margin for deviations from the path to independence through political maneuvering. As a result, on September 28, the Puigdemont administration secured a vote of confidence in parliament, with the commitment to hold a binding and, if necessary, unilateral independence referendum within a year. Thus, the secessionist roadmap continued with a significant revision.

Nevertheless, how would the organization of the RUI proceed despite Madrid's determination to block it at all costs? Would ministers and bureaucrats be willing to sign decisions that could potentially result in accusations of sedition, rebellion, and misuse of public funds? The ministries directly related to the referendum's organization, such as Interior, Governance, and the Presidency, were under PDeCAT's control. Puigdemont still vividly remembered how, during the 9-N process, the entire political and legal burden had fallen on CDC, while ERC had

risen. Therefore, Puigdemont appointed Junqueras and Raül Romeva as those responsible for carrying out the referendum within the government, thinking this would balance the responsibilities between ERC and PDeCAT to ensure shared accountability (Casas et al, 2020, p. 32).

During this period, due to the possibility of opening a negotiation process through the *Operación Dialogo* initiated by the PP government, prompted the Catalan government to refrain from taking any steps towards organizing the RUI in the early months. However, as examined in Chapter 5, following the meeting between Rajoy and Puigdemont in mid-January 2017, this possibility definitively collapsed, thereby making the unilateral organization of the referendum a priority for the government once again. Meanwhile, the ongoing legal cases stemming from the 9-N referendum heightened concerns within the Generalitat bureaucracy, and distrust between ERC and PDeCAT ministers reached its peak. Early elections to end the process, once again, remained one of the options on the table. In February, during an informal meeting between PDeCAT and ERC leaders, all options were discussed, and finally they decided to proceed with the roadmap as planned. (Casas et al., 2020, p. 36)

Conversely, as the referendum deadline approached, no concrete progress had been made. As discussed in Chapter 5, this deadlock was resolved in April with the formation of a Estat Major under the political guidance of Puigdemont and Junqueras, composed of select PDeCAT and ERC leaders, leaders of secessionist entities, and trusted independent individuals, tasked with addressing the “extra-legal” aspects of the referendum.

Nevertheless, while the formation of the Estat Major facilitated the technical organization of the process, it also sparked new tensions within the government and

PDeCAT leadership. In the early months of 2017, internal government discussions and leaked criticisms of Puigdemont by some PDeCAT officials had already exacerbated existing mistrust. The establishment of the Estat Major further fueled concerns among some ministers and PDeCAT leaders that control was slipping away from them. While individuals without formal responsibility held strategic decision-making power within the Estat Major, those bearing political and legal accountability felt they lacked sufficient information about the course of events. Puigdemont, however, viewed this secrecy as essential for the successful organization of the referendum and demanded that the ministers trust him.

The crisis erupted on July 3 when PDeCAT minister Jordi Baiget made public statements, expressing that the ministers were not fully informed about the referendum process and that he found the likelihood of the referendum taking place unrealistic (Xirgo, 2017). Baiget was dismissed the day after his statements. However, other cabinet members shared similar concerns, and the internal crisis reignited the possibility of ending the process altogether. Among the seven PDeCAT ministers, only Josep Rull appeared to be fully convinced about the RUI. Baiget's dismissal raised the possibility that other PDeCAT ministers might also resign, reopening discussions about ending the process and calling early elections.

Moreover, there were leaders among the PDeCAT direction who shared similar concerns to those of the ministers. For example, Marta Pascal and David Bonvehí, holding the third and fourth highest positions in the party, expressed doubts about the unilateral process, believed that the government was making undue concessions to the CUP, and were more inclined toward holding early elections. On July 10, a decisive meeting took place between PDeCAT president Mas, general coordinator Pascal, president Puigdemont, and other PDeCAT cabinet members. Mas

emphasized that the referendum would be held at all costs and that party unity must be preserved, adding that ministers who were not convinced of the process were free to resign. In response, the dissenting ministers demanded the dissolution of the Estat Major and insisted that public funds should not be used for the referendum's organization to avoid malversation charges. The meeting ended without a conclusive result, and discussions within PDeCAT leadership continued. (Casas et al., 2020, p. 73)

Puigdemont's decision to continue with the roadmap at all costs proved decisive, leading to the resignation of four PDeCAT ministers, including vice president Neus Munté, on July 14. They were replaced by four new PDeCAT members committed to RUI and prepared to face the judicial consequences. Such a crisis at the PDeCAT summit, just two months before the referendum, highlights the divisions over political strategy, the uncertainties surrounding the roadmap, the fragility of the process, and ultimately, the impact of leadership decisions.

With the resolution of the cabinet crisis, the secessionist movement had now unified around the goal of the 1-O unilateral referendum, shifting its focus back to overcoming the obstacles posed by the Spanish state. As examined in Chapter 5, the secessionists' success in secretly distributing ballot boxes across the entire country, the grassroots efforts to keep schools open, and the miscalculations of the PP government enabled the Generalitat to carry out the 1-O referendum with far higher participation than anticipated. However, the successful realization of 1-O was only one stop on Everest that secessionism had to overcome. How would secessionism achieve independence after the referendum? Was there any possibility of reopening negotiations with Madrid following 1-O? If not, how would the Generalitat execute a unilateral break? Should the government encourage mass mobilizations and civil

disobedience, or end the process by calling for early elections? Throughout the uncertain days of October, these questions remained unresolved, and the way leadership decisions unfolded ultimately determined how the juncture would close.

8.3.3 The days of October

Those days in October 2017 were probably the most difficult days of my time in government, even more so than the agonizing days of the bailout five years earlier.

Mariano Rajoy, 2019

“Every day is a Vietnam”

Carles Puigdemont, September 2017

The expression “days of October” undoubtedly reminds political scientists primarily of the Russian Revolution. October 1917 was a month of heightened uncertainty and tension about how the revolutionary process (“critical juncture”) that had begun in February 1917 would proceed. As mass mobilization and radicalization continued, the Bolsheviks emerged as the most likely contenders for power. However, there were deep divisions within their leadership concerning political strategy. One faction advocated for seizing power through an armed uprising, leveraging the majority they had gained in the soviets, while another faction favored reaching an agreement with the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries to enable the Constituent Assembly to function as a sovereign body (Trotsky, 1967). In the end, the first faction prevailed, and on October 25, according to the Julian calendar, the Bolsheviks seized power.

Exactly one hundred years after the revolutionary process in Russia, developments reminiscent of the “days of October” were unfolding in Catalonia, despite the vast political differences between the two contexts. Catalonia was experiencing the largest mobilizations in its history, with the “R” in CDR shifting from Referendum to Republic. The possibility of breaking away from the Spanish

state as a viable option was a pressing issue, discussed everywhere—from Generalitat meetings to the streets. Political uncertainty was at its peak, with different strategic proposals were floating and colliding with each other. For a brief moment, the role of agency and leadership decisions became the most decisive factors in determining how this juncture would close.

The "days of October" also carry a more specific meaning in Catalonia's history. As noted in Chapter 4, following the coming to power of a far-right government in Spain, on October 6, 1934, ERC leader and President of the Generalitat, Lluís Companys, announced the severance of all ties with the existing institutions and declared the establishment of a "Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic". This uprising was brutally suppressed by the Spanish government, resulting in the deaths of seventy-four people, the dissolution of the Generalitat, and the imprisonment of nearly five thousand individuals, including Companys himself. (Broué & Temime, 1961)

Following the 1-O independence referendum, Catalonia once again found itself in the "days of October." As mentioned earlier, one of the primary reasons for holding the RUI was to overcome the legitimacy issue stemming from the 47.9% vote share that secessionism had achieved in the 27-S 2015 elections. On 1-O, 90% of those who participated voted "Yes" for independence, but the turnout, just like in 9-N consultation, remained at 43%. Notwithstanding the legal impediments and police violence, which rendered the participation rate a historical success in terms of a social protest, this turnout remained insufficient to fully resolve the legitimacy issue. While there were some, notably from the ERC and the CUP, who argued for the immediate proclamation of DUI, the *Govern* (Catalan Government) therefore postponed this decision to force negotiations with the PP government, rather than

proclaiming the DUI within 48 hours of the referendum, as stipulated in the referendum law. (Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020)

As these debates continued, the general strike, also known as the "national shutdown", on October 3rd (3-O) introduced a new dimension to the discussion by turning into a gigantic mass mobilization. The strength of 3-O lay in the fact that it brought not only secessionist supporters but also those protesting police violence and respect Catalonia's "right to decide" onto the streets. In light of the massive participation, CUP representatives, along with Òmnium leader Jordi Cuixart, proposed staying in the streets indefinitely. According to Cuixart, only sustained pressure from the masses could force Rajoy to back down for negotiations and make the establishment of the Republic possible. The Generalitat seriously considered this proposal, with discussions throughout the day about setting up camps along Barcelona's main avenues. However, "to prevent the situation from spiraling out of control", finally the secessionist leadership ultimately decided not to implement the plan. (Casas et al., 2020, pp. 148-9)

Nevertheless, even after 3-O, the Generalitat continued to discuss the option of declaring the Republic through civil disobedience and mass mobilization. The plan, named *Operació Castell*, involved forming a human chain around the Generalitat building to prevent police intervention through passive resistance after the declaration of independence ("Set dies d'octubre," 2018; Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020). As part of this plan, *Govern* evaluated the possible outcomes of the DUI across three different scenarios, spanning from optimistic to pessimistic outcomes. The question also arises as to whether the *Mossos* should be used defensively in response to the police intervention that the Spanish state would likely employ after the DUI. Puigdemont categorically rejected this possibility, arguing that it could

undermine the peaceful nature of the secessionist movement, which had been a defining feature from the start, and damage its international legitimacy.

After 1-O, three main tendencies emerged within *Govern* and *Estat Major*, which were not strictly aligned with party affiliations. The first tendency advocated for the immediate declaration of independence through *Operació Castell* or a similar plan, emphasizing the need to strengthen mass mobilization and face the potential consequences head-on. This group included Jordi Turull, vice president of government from PDeCAT; Clara Ponsatí, the education minister from PDeCAT's list and a prominent figure in ANC; Marta Rovira, the ERC general secretary; and Lluís Llach, a member of Estat Major from ERC; and Cuixart, leader of Òmnium (Casas et al., 2020, p. 155). CUP was also, without a doubt, in favor of this position, although it remained outside the decision-making mechanisms.

The second proposal was to call for early elections to the Catalan Parliament under Spanish law, with the promise of a future DUI. In this scenario, if these elections were held with high turnout and secessionist parties surpassed the 50% threshold, it could create a new basis for legitimacy to pressure the central government into negotiations. Minister of Enterprise from PDeCAT Santi Vila, PDeCAT president Mas and general coordinator Pascal and ERC minister Carles Mundó favored this option. For example, in his interview with the Financial Times on October 6, Mas emphasized that the country was not yet ready for "real independence." He stressed the importance of remaining pragmatic and taking into account the potential backlash from Madrid:

We have won the right to be an independent country. The question now is how do we exercise that right, and here obviously there are decisions to be taken. And these decisions must have one objective in mind: this is not just about proclaiming independence but about actually becoming an independent country ... The important thing is that the declaration produces a country that really is independent, and to be independent there are some things we still

don't have, such as territorial control, tax collection and the judicial system. (Buck & Stothard, 2017)

Finally, the third option was to first symbolically proclaim DUI and then either call early elections for the Catalan parliament under Spanish law, or subsequently announce the suspension of the DUI and pursue an opportunity to initiate negotiations with Madrid. The formula known as the "Slovenian path" (*vía eslovena*) was inspired by Slovenia's approach in 1990, where it first declared independence from Yugoslavia and then immediately suspended the proclamation to engage in negotiations with the central state and seek international recognition. Puigdemont, Junqueras, and ANC leader Jordi Sànchez leaned toward this approach. (Garcia, 2017a; Casas et al., 2020, pp. 155-7)

On the other hand, within the debates among secessionists, three key actors were identified as potential forces capable of pressuring the PP government into negotiations: the King, the EU, and the business sector. However, following the events of 1-O, all three actors deeply disappointed the secessionists. First, as noted in Chapter 5, in his speech on October 3, the King made the PP government's policy almost a state policy. EU representatives, while condemning the PP government's police violence, strongly opposed any attempt of unilateral declaration of independence and limited themselves to calling for dialogue and negotiations (Navarro, 2017). As for the business sector, starting on October 6, major banks and companies announced that they were relocating their headquarters from Catalonia to other parts of the country and expressed their clear opposition to the DUI (Pérez, 2022).

As the possibility of negotiations diminished and debates and uncertainties persisted within the Generalitat, the moment of decision was drawing near. After the Generalitat officially announced the referendum results on October 6, Puigdemont

had to decide on one of the aforementioned options and present it to the parliament.

Thus, *Govern* announced that the parliament would convene on October 10.

Meanwhile, the President was literally caught between two fires. On one side, the PP government, the moderate faction of PDeCAT, the business sector, and EU representatives pressured him to call early elections without proclaiming a DUI. On the other side, secessionist entities, CUP, and the ERC majority demanded the immediate proclamation of DUI, believing that any potential negotiations with Madrid could only begin after this move.

Amid all this chaos, Puigdemont opted for the third option mentioned above, “*via eslovena*”. In other words, instead of a "declaration of independence", he formulated a "declaration about independence" (Garcia, 2017b). In his historic speech before the parliament on October 10, he first declared Catalonia's independence but immediately announced its suspension to initiate dialogue:

At this historic moment, and as President of the Generalitat, I assume, by presenting the results of the referendum before all of you and our citizens, the mandate for the people of Catalonia to become an independent state in the form of a republic. This is what we solemnly do today, with responsibility and respect. And with the same solemnity, the Government and I propose that the Parliament suspend the effects of the declaration of independence so that we may initiate a dialogue in the coming weeks, without which it is impossible to reach an agreed solution. (“El texto íntegro del discurso”, 2017)

Puigdemont was fully aware that his announcement alone would not prompt a change in the PP government's stance. Through the suspension decision, he aimed to send a message to the EU, which had called for dialogue, as well as to the opposition parties PSOE and Podemos, and the moderate faction within his own party. His goal was to emphasize that the Generalitat remained open to dialogue (Garcia Pagan, 2017c). However, the suspension announcement did not generate the desired effect for the Govern. Immediately after Puigdemont's speech, Rajoy contacted PSOE, seeking the socialists' support to implement Article 155. PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez

agreed to back its implementation, provided that a constitutional reform process would begin within six months and early elections in Catalonia would be swiftly announced. Meanwhile, C's argued that the government had already delayed the application of Article 155 for too long. Following the opposition's support, Rajoy declared, "there is no possible mediation between the rule of law and disobedience or illegality" and sent a letter to Puigdemont, demanding a clear response within five days on whether he had declared independence or not. (Del Riego, 2017a).



Figure 16. Crowds follow Puigdemont's parliamentary speech in the streets on October 10, 2017⁵¹

Photo: Iván Alvarado (Reuters) Source: Junquera, 2024

The following days were marked by exchanges of letters between Puigdemont and Rajoy. In his first letter to Rajoy on October 16, Puigdemont refrained from giving a clear "Yes" or "No" response regarding the declaration of independence. Instead, he reiterated his call for dialogue ("La carta de respuesta", 2017). On the same day,

⁵¹ On October 10, thousands gathered in Parc de la Ciutadella to follow Puigdemont's speech, ready to celebrate the declaration of independence. These two photos vividly capture the emotional response of the crowd to Puigdemont's announcement: first, the joy as he declared independence, followed 45 seconds later by the confusion and disappointment as he announced its suspension.

Rajoy (2017) responded with another letter, once again demanding a clear and straightforward answer to his question. He warned that, if Puigdemont failed to provide a direct response, he would hold Puigdemont accountable for the consequences of applying Article 155. In his response dated October 19, Puigdemont maintained his previous stance, concluding the letter with the statement: "If the State Government persists in blocking dialogue and continues repression, the Parliament of Catalonia may proceed, if it deems appropriate, to formally vote on the declaration of independence, which was not voted on October 10." ("Carta de Carles Puigdemont", 2017).

The circle around Puigdemont was tightening rapidly. While the exchange of letters continued, Òmnium's president, Jordi Cuixart, and ANC's president, Jordi Sànchez, were arrested on charges of "sedition" for their involvement in the September 20 protests. This move was a significant indicator of the impending repression. Immediately following Puigdemont's second response, on October 20, Rajoy's government invoked Article 155, activating the dissolution of Catalonia's autonomy and announcing that elections would be held within six months. The decision was submitted to the Senate for its final approval. (Del Riego, 2017b)

Puigdemont now had two options. He could either call for early elections before the application of Article 155 or proceed with the DUI, after which the PP government would dissolve the Catalan autonomous community and announce new elections. Meanwhile, the composition of those demanding immediate elections and those urging immediate DUI had not changed. The only difference was the escalating pressure from both sides as the moment for a definitive decision drew nearer. Puigdemont knew that if he opted for early elections, a significant portion of the secessionist camp would accuse him of "surrender" and "betrayal." On the other

hand, if he declared independence, the secessionist leadership would likely face convictions for "rebellion against the government," and the application of Article 155 could lead to severe restrictions on Catalonia's autonomy in the years to come. Under this difficult equation, Puigdemont intended to make his final decision following meetings with the government and *Estat Major*. At this point, however, he was suffering from the division and competition within the secessionist camp: "I am alone. I feel alone. Alone and without the solidarity of the government. If I had a government that was ready to go all the way, that stood by me, telling me: 'Don't back down, go all the way,' it would be different. But that's not the case."

(Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020)

The first decisive meeting was on October 24, a routine cabinet meeting. After extensive consultations and vacillations between alternatives, Puigdemont arrived at the meeting with a proposal to call for early elections before the Senate could approve the implementation of Article 155. He believed this option was the best way to prevent the damage that the article's enforcement could inflict on the country's future. Within the cabinet, however, the split between those in favor of early elections and those in favor of a DUI remained. Although some ERC ministers supported the early election proposal, the party's official stance was still in favor of declaring independence. At the same time, throughout the "days of October" the ERC kept a low profile, waiting to see how far Puigdemont would go. Polls indicated that ERC was leading, giving the party hope of winning in the event of early elections (Juliana, 2017). If Puigdemont proceeded with early elections, ERC planned to shift the blame for not following through with the roadmap onto Puigdemont and PDeCAT. Meanwhile, Junqueras and the ERC leadership were also mentally preparing for the consequences of DUI. Junqueras had informed the party leadership

that he could face a long period of imprisonment and that the party had to be prepared for this. Within this strategic positioning, ERC did not support Puigdemont's proposal for early elections but refrained from opposing it directly, stating that they would abide by the president's decision. (Casas et al., 2020)

The leak to *La Vanguardia* of the details of this meeting, which did not result in any final decision and was supposed to remain confidential, and its publication on October 25 with the headline "Division in Government", exacerbated tensions and mistrust within the government. Moreover, following the leak, the concerns of those supporting DUI intensified within secessionism, and accusations of betrayal against Puigdemont began to surface on social media and in the streets.

On October 25, the final decision was to be made during a joint meeting of *Govern* and *Estat Major*. Puigdemont opened the meeting by stressing the need to call early elections in order to halt the "suspension of autonomy," preserve Catalan institutions, and prevent state violence. In this tense atmosphere, Junqueras chose to remain silent, while ERC's secretary general, Marta Rovira, firmly opposed Puigdemont's proposal and advocated for the immediate DUI. Earlier that morning, the JxSí parliamentary group—comprising members from PDeCAT, ERC, and independent secessionists—had met and unanimously expressed their stance to "see it through to the end" instead of opting for early elections. The final meeting was highly tense, with various alternative scenarios being debated until 2 a.m. the



Figure 17. *La Vanguardia* headline of 25.10.2017, "Division in the Government between calling elections and DUI"

following day. Ultimately, Puigdemont's position prevailed, and it was decided to hold early elections on December 20. However, the meeting concluded with a mood of dissatisfaction on all sides. (Garcia Pagan & Gisbert, 2017)

While explaining how events reached this chaotic point, Puigdemont acknowledged that they had underestimated the extent of state violence: "We expected the state to be very harsh. But we did not anticipate that today's Spain, in the 21st century, could act as it did under Franco. In that, we were mistaken" (Puigdemont & Xirgo, 2020). However, there was another crucial factor Puigdemont had not accounted for on October 25: the magnitude of the backlash from the secessionist factions and the extent of internal discord in response to the decision to call early elections.

On October 26, the day began with a meeting of the JxSí parliamentary group. Puigdemont faced fierce backlash from pro-DUI deputies, but the decision remained unchanged. By the afternoon, driven by the CUP's orientation and led by *Universitat per la República*, hundreds of secessionists began gathering in front of the Generalitat to protest the early election decision. Cries of "traitor" echoed in Puigdemont's ears. Meanwhile, there was significant disarray within both PDeCAT and ERC. Discontented members of both parties voiced their opposition on Twitter, criticizing the decision. Reports emerged in the media suggesting that ERC might withdraw from the government if Puigdemont officially announced the early elections. Although ERC leaders had initially declared that they would abide by Puigdemont's decision, the party direction met to discuss the details of withdrawing from the government (Garcia Pagan, 2017d). Distrust and tensions between PDeCAT and ERC now reached their peak.

For Puigdemont, the most troubling aspect was the silence from the PP government. He sought guarantees that the decision to call early elections would halt the implementation of Article 155. However, he received no response from Rajoy. On the contrary, some PP officials publicly suggested that early elections would not prevent the enforcement of Article 155. Faced with the absence of assurances from Madrid, signals that ERC would shift all the blame onto him, and increasing accusations of "betrayal," Puigdemont reconsidered his decision and took a step back. In the afternoon, he summoned Junqueras and Rovira to his office for a new meeting and informed them that he would proclaim DUI. Following this meeting, Puigdemont announced in a press release that early elections were not on the agenda, as he had not received guarantees that Article 155 would not be implemented, and that parliament would meet the next day to discuss the implementation of 1-O's mandate (Garcia Pagan, 2017d). Following the press release, Santi Vila, the most moderate member of the cabinet and the minister who had been pushing the negotiation channels with Madrid until the last moment, resigned. Thus, the extraordinary October 26th, which began with the plan to announce early elections, ended with the president's announcement of the DUI.

The following day was a historic one for both the Catalan parliament and the Spanish Senate. In the Catalan parliament, the speaker read the resolution proclaiming the establishment of the Catalan Republic as an independent and sovereign state, which was passed with the votes of the secessionists. However, during this symbolic DUI in the parliament, reluctantly and half-heartedly proclaimed, there was more dissatisfaction, uncertainty and anxiety than the mood of triumph and optimism. Only the CUP members seemed visibly content, yet even they had no clear idea about what the next step would be (Garcia Pagan, 2017e).

Only two hours after DUI, the Spanish Senate approved the PP government's proposal to apply Article 155 to Catalonia. On the same day, Rajoy signed the decree dissolving the Catalan government and parliament and scheduled new elections for the Catalan parliament to take place on December 21, 2017. Meanwhile, thousands of people took to the streets to defend Catalan institutions, but neither Govern had called for mass mobilization, nor was there the same energy, enthusiasm, or hope that had characterized the early days of October. The abrupt end of the Catalan Republic experiment after only five hours, with the enforcement of Article 155, also marked the conclusion of the “days of October.”

Overall, a profound contrast emerges between the glory and exuberance of 1-O and 3-O and the symbolism and dullness of 27-O. This contrast brings the question to the fore: Did the secessionist government have a plan for after 1-O? According to journalist Lola Garcia, the Generalitat's expectations for the post-1-O period were overly naive:

The pro-independence strategists had a plan designed down to the smallest detail until October 1, until the 4th at the latest, but they did not count on the slamming of the door by the European Union and the reaction of the economic world. And now it turns out that there is no plan B. (Garcia, 2017c)

A similar assessment of the lack of planning comes from Agustí Colomines, former director of the think tank CatDem, close to the CDC, from 2007 to 2013, director of the Public Administration School of Catalonia from 2016 to 2018, and professor of history at the University of Barcelona. Colomines highlights the destructiveness of internal competition within secessionism and the tactical dimension of the independence referendum, rather than a well-calculated strategy:

The problem is that the political parties had no program. There was no agreement. This process was conducted much like the Civil War in 1936: a major struggle against the enemy and an internal struggle among political parties. And this is the perfect equation for everything to go wrong... The referendum was a trade-off to get the CUP to approve a budget, and suddenly,

something that was meant to be temporary became central. But Junts pel Sí never seriously considered the possibility of actually holding a referendum. So, as I mentioned at the beginning, the feeling that it was all tactics. (Author Interview with Colomines, 15.12.2022)

The ambiguous and blurry nature of the CDC leadership's political strategy—and that of the secessionist leadership in general— for the post-1-O period made agency choices particularly decisive during the “days of October.” Would Catalonia have achieved independence through mass mobilization if Puigdemont had accepted Cuixart's proposal and pursued Operació Castells? Could a new pact between Spain and Catalonia have removed independence from the agenda if Rajoy had taken steps to initiate negotiations? If Puigdemont had opted for early elections immediately after 1-O, would his party have disappeared entirely from the political scene? These questions remain counterfactuals whose answers we will never know for sure. During the “days of October,” all these possibilities were present as actual options, and ultimately, Puigdemont’s final decision—caught between “moving forward and risking everything, or stepping back and losing it all” (Garcia Pagan, 2017f)—became the decisive factor, shaping and closing this critical juncture. In Catalonia, the influence of state repression and fierce intra-secessionist rivalries made the decision-making process especially complex. The next section shifts focus to Scotland to examine similar mechanisms in a different context.

8.3.4 The road to the Scottish referendum: “An unexpected journey”

While the referendum initiative in Catalonia can be described as a slow-motion, multi-year process, the words “unexpectedness” and “suddenness” might better identify the path to a referendum in Scotland. These words undoubtedly refer not to the discussion around the referendum itself but to way in which the organization of a referendum became an actual and possible option. In Chapter 6, we saw that the

referendum proposal marked a new step in the SNP's gradualist strategy.

Accordingly, a vote for the SNP would not automatically mean a vote for independence. Instead of immediately pursuing independence upon securing a majority in the Scottish Parliament, the SNP would organize a referendum on the issue. Thus, the SNP aimed to attract votes from those who did not support independence and to prove itself as a competent party to govern at Holyrood.

However, this strategy presented a dilemma: if voters become satisfied with the SNP government and saw it as competent, why would they then push for independence?

Indeed, following the SNP's minority government experience from 2007 to 2011, the party succeeded in raising its vote share above 45% in the 2011 election, while support for independence remained around 30%. One reason for this gap was the non-secessionist votes going to the SNP, while another factor was that the SNP achieved this percentage in an election with a turnout as low as 50%.

The 2011 election was an extraordinary and unexpected victory for the SNP. In an electoral system designed to ensure that no single party could win an absolute majority in the parliament, the SNP managed to secure an outright majority. With this result, there was no longer any obstacle for the SNP to put the independence referendum on the agenda. However, should this referendum be held at a time when popular support for independence was quite low, and if so, how could it be won? At this point, we see that leadership decisions started to come into play as a causal factor.

In fact, after the election, there were some within the SNP leadership who raised the possibility of taking the referendum off the agenda (Torrance, 2013, pp. 12-3). However, the prevailing view was that such a move would place the SNP in an even more challenging position. Instead, the SNP leadership's plan was to hold the

referendum as late as possible within the five-year parliamentary term and to structure it as a multi-option referendum that would include the option of full devolution. In this way, Salmond and his team demonstrated their commitment to the referendum promise while working to minimize the unfavorable conditions surrounding it as much as possible (Mitchell, 2016).

On the other hand, the SNP leadership's determination alone was not enough to hold the referendum. It also required permission from the UK government. In fact, discussions on self-governance between the Con-Dem government's Prime Minister Cameron, who came to power in 2010, and First Minister Salmond had already begun before the 2011 elections. Salmond was trying to persuade Cameron to adopt a radical devolution plan that included fiscal autonomy. Although Cameron considered this proposal, he was not convinced to implement it at that time (Salmond, 2015, p. 20).

After the 2011 elections, Cameron's administration faced an enormous challenge. As examined in Chapter 6, the authority to hold a binding independence referendum or to delegate this authority lay with Westminster (Scottish Affairs Committee, 2012). During this period, there were factions within both the Conservatives and Liberals that opposed holding a referendum. However, based on the low support for independence, Cameron anticipated that a referendum would deliver a fatal blow to the SNP and decided to accept the SNP's request. In return, Cameron had two conditions: the referendum should be held swiftly, and the ballot paper should include only "Yes" and "No" options regarding independence, removing the devo-max option from consideration.

Thus, two "unexpected" developments—the SNP's absolute majority in 2011 and Cameron's quick acceptance of holding a referendum under certain conditions—

suddenly placed the secession issue at the center of Scottish politics. Once Cameron's administration gave the green light for an independence referendum, the specifics of the process were determined through negotiations. As discussed in Chapter 6, in exchange for the SNP's agreement to remove the devo-max option, Cameron accepted a later date for the referendum (September 2014) and allowed the Scottish government authority over the question's wording and other details. Consequently, in these negotiations, the leaders' strategic self-positioning, bargaining skills, and decisions bring up counterfactual scenarios. What if Cameron had not agreed to a later referendum date or had been open to devo-max? Did Salmond keep devo-max on the table to leverage concessions on other issues, or did he genuinely agree to a single-question referendum at the cost of a significant compromise? In such matters, leaders' choices played a pivotal role in shaping the referendum process.

Although Salmond took a big risk by agreeing to a single-question referendum, the SNP and Scottish secessionism overall managed to leverage the over-two-year referendum campaign period very effectively. As examined in Chapters 6 and 7 from various perspectives, the initial one-third public support for independence gradually increased, and by two weeks before the referendum, some polls showed support for Yes and No were neck and neck. At this crucial point, a strategic decision by Cameron's administration became a determining factor in the referendum outcome. Just three days before the vote, the Better Together parties released a joint declaration, known as The Vow, which promised an immediate start to a new reform process to expand Scotland's powers in the event of a No outcome. This last-minute leadership intervention shifted the character of the referendum from a choice between the status quo and independence to a choice between independence and "devo-max." Ironically, the devo-max option, which Cameron had previously

insisted on removing from the ballot in exchange for concessions in other areas, was now added back onto the ballot by Cameron's own side. This last-minute maneuver had a significant impact on the Better Together campaign, which was on the verge of losing, getting 55% of the vote in the referendum. (Liñeria et al., 2017)

8.3.5 Battle for winning the economic case

“When it came to sterling, the First Minister appeared to be arguing that Scotland and rUK were, to borrow a phrase, better together.”
David Torrance, 2013

Following the signing of the Edinburgh Agreement between the UK and Scottish governments, which made the shape of the referendum concrete, the primary focus for both the Yes and No campaigns became how to frame their territorial visions and effectively communicating these frames to the public. Unlike in Catalonia, the referendum process in Scotland was bilateral, meaning that instead of democratic or national issues, the campaigns centered on economic and social concerns. Both sides aimed to subsume the socio-economic dimension into the territorial one to secure a favorable outcome in the referendum.

As examined in Chapter 6, the SNP's primary concern was to project a moderate image of independence that would not unsettle the middle classes. They aimed to prevent social groups with mortgage payments or modest savings from voting No due to fears of disruption and uncertainty potentially that independence might cause. Therefore, the SNP campaign emphasized "continuity" rather than "rupture" for the post-independence period. Meanwhile, other factions of the secessionist movement focused on engaging the poor and working-class segments who had lost hope in the current system, did not typically vote, and sought radical

change. The previous chapter explored how this alternative campaign was quite effective, mobilizing those who would normally abstain from voting.

On the other hand, Better Together's "project fear" was also a highly effective campaign, and in the historic voter turnout, the mobilizing nature of not only the Yes campaign but also the No campaign was decisive. Yes Scotland's chief strategist, Stephen Noon, evaluates the situation as follows:

One of the reasons for the huge turnout wasn't just the mobilization of people who had never voted for before, but it was also the mobilization of people who felt that what they had in life was under threat, the pension or their mortgage or whatever it was. I think the Yes campaign was successful in one level in mobilizing people, but the No campaign was also successful through its means of mobilizing its campaign ... My belief is that we won the social argument during the referendum, but we lost the economic argument (Author Interview with Noon, 19.02.2024)

Noon's statement that "we lost the economic argument" is worth reflecting on. In fact, the primary reason for the SNP's failure in the economic argument was its inability to sufficiently convince the middle classes and pensioners that independence would not lead to uncertainty or that it would create a more economically advantageous situation. Within this framework, the most contentious issue throughout the campaign was the currency issue. While the SNP argued that the "currency union" would continue after independence, Better Together identified this as the soft underbelly of the Yes campaign, as analyzed in Chapter 6. The UK government and Better Together representatives emphasized that a currency union would not continue in the event of independence, highlighting the potential negative economic consequences of the ensuing uncertainty. This conflict between the two governments over the currency issue and the resulting uncertainty was particularly concerning for the economically vulnerable.

However, Salmond and his team were convinced that continuing the currency union was the best option for Scotland's economic interests, and they had

several rational arguments supporting this view. The real problem lay in the campaign's inability to present these arguments and any alternative plans convincingly. The currency issue was also the most critical topic in the first live television debate between Better Together spokesperson Alistair Darling and Salmond on August 5, 2014. When Darling accused the SNP of not having a "Plan B" for the currency, Salmond was unable to provide a satisfactory response to the audience, which only heightened the concerns of voters already wary of the economic risks of independence. Salmond acknowledges this in his memoirs:

When challenged by Alistair on a currency 'Plan B, I should have counter-attacked at once, pointing out that it is impossible to stop any country using a tradeable international currency. My own questions to Darling should have been on issues that directly matter to people, like jobs and health, rather than more political debating points, which we had devised immediately before the debate. I am really annoyed with myself about that, since the concentration on issues that really matter is exactly what I've been advocating at campaign meetings for the last few meetings. (Salmond, 2015, p. 141)

Following this TV debate, although Salmond and the Yes Scotland campaigners tried to develop a more detailed and persuasive framework on the currency issue in the final weeks, this effort did not lead to a significant shift among those sympathetic to independence but inclined to vote "No" due to economic concerns. Indeed, the referendum results showed a majority of "No" votes in more middle class cities, conservative rural areas, and among retirees (Curtice, 2014). Major cities like Edinburgh, known for its strong middle class presence (with 38.9% voting "Yes"), and Aberdeen, relatively affluent and reliant on the oil sector (41.4% "Yes"), saw decisive "No" victories ("Scotland Decides," 2014). As a result, in only four of the thirty-two constituencies did the Yes vote secure a majority, and all of these were relatively poor working class areas:

... Dundee (57.3%), West Dunbartonshire (54.0%), Glasgow (53.5%) and North Lanarkshire (51.1%). Between them these four areas are amongst the top six in terms of the unemployment claimant count and the proportion

living in an area of multiple deprivation, and amongst the bottom six in their proportions of people in professional and managerial occupations. They are also all in the bottom third in respect of the proportion of their populations that are aged 65 or over and the proportion born in the rest of the UK. (Curtice, 2014)

In addition to the currency debate, another major handicap for the Yes Scotland campaign was the sense of disenchantment resulting from its emphasis on "continuity." Rather than portraying independence as a project aimed at making tangible, positive changes in the lives of both working and middle classes, the SNP focused on allaying the fears instilled by "Project Fear" and convincing voters that it would be "business as usual". The SNP's key messages throughout the campaign were a relatively minimal and short-term vision of independence, such as getting rid of the Tory mandate and protecting the NHS. This approach nurtured a "why take the risk?" sentiment, especially among economically vulnerable groups or those with "something to lose". In contrast, Better Together highlighted the long-term consequences of the referendum results. In a speech three days before the referendum, Prime Minister Cameron particularly underscored this point:

Please don't mix up the temporary and the permanent. Please don't think: 'I'm frustrated with politics right now, so I'll walk out the door and never come back.' ... If you don't like me – I won't be here forever. If you don't like this government – it won't last forever. But if you leave the UK – that will be forever. (Watt et al., 2014)

From the opposite perspective, SSP leader Colin Fox also emphasized this point. Saying, "The YES side can only win if it can persuade Scotland's working-class majority they will be economically, socially, and politically better off," Fox criticized the SNP for failing to convey a strong sense of hope for change:

On the other hand, the middle class, they were coming massive turnout too, because they wanted to stop the other side. If independence is about change, we win. If independence is not about change, we lose. And we're losing just because the SNP's central message is "we don't like the Tories", but nothing else will change. (Author Interview with Fox, 12.03.2014)

These observations certainly do not imply that the SNP's strategy in the referendum campaign was a failure. On the contrary, the increase in support for independence from around 30% to nearly 50%, culminating in 45% support on the day of the referendum, can itself be seen as a success. However, it is evident that the SNP leadership was not sufficiently persuasive on issues of economic uncertainty, making this aspect one of the essential elements in understanding the significance of leadership decisions in the Scottish referendum process.

8.4 A blurry strategy between rupture and bargaining

This chapter examined how secessionist actors (re)constructed the meaning of independence, especially during moments when independence emerged as a concrete and actual political option. While Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated how the center-periphery interaction shaped the limits of rupture and bargaining, this chapter focused on how secessionist actors concretized rupture and bargaining in their territorial visions. It sought to understand the meaning of independence and the nature of secessionist strategy along three main axes. First, it questioned where the parties' territorial strategies fit into the tension between radicalism and moderation. Drawing on the existing debates in the literature and their shortcomings, as well as the secessionist actors' visions of sovereignty, it clarified what radicalization meant for both CDC and SNP. Second, it illuminated the heterogeneity and plurality within secessionism by analyzing the dynamics of unity and confrontation among secessionist factions. Third, it demonstrated how leadership decisions at critical junctures gave concrete form to the strategy and meaning of independence.

The data obtained from process tracing and in-depth interviews revealed that as decisive moments approached, there was a noticeable shift toward "strategic

ambiguity" or "position blurring" between rupture and bargaining. The first section of the chapter had discussed the existing findings on ambiguity within the secessionism literature. Scholars like Massetti (2009) attempted to create categories by distinguishing between "ambiguous secessionists" and "strongly committed secessionists." Similarly, Lluch (2014) differentiated between "pactists" and "principled independentists," while Meadwell (2009) drew lines between "insincere secessionists" and "sincere secessionists." However, we also noted that these studies are still in their preliminary stages and have yet to become systematic. This chapter aims to contribute to fill this gap in the literature by providing an in-depth analysis of how the phenomenon of ambiguity manifests itself, particularly on the eve of referendums. This detailed examination demonstrates that, by keeping in mind the temporal variance in their strategies, our cases may align more closely with the first side of the aforementioned conceptual frameworks (i.e. "ambiguous secessionists" or "pactists" or "insincere secessionists").

Besides the literature on secessionism, the literature on party competition also problematizes the phenomenon of "ambiguity". As discussed in the Literature Review section, Rovny (2013) argues that parties may either avoid clear positioning on certain issue dimensions or choose to blur their position. Elias et al. (2015) define the adoption of vague, contradictory, or ambiguous positions by parties as a "blurry strategy." Koedam (2021) categorizes blurring into three sub-categories: avoidance, ambiguity, and alternation. The goal of such strategies is vote maximization and attracting diverse voter groups.

Can the territorial strategies of CDC and SNP be defined as "position blurring" in this context? We have previously seen that CDC was founded as an autonomist party, but defined its territorial goals in a vague (possibilist) manner,

encompassing different tendencies within the party. Starting from the mid-1990s, initial signs of a shift from autonomism to sovereigntism began to appear. With the introduction of the "right to decide" concept, sovereigntism became the main trend, particularly during the 2010 Catalan parliamentary election campaign. In the following years, we observed how this evolved from sovereigntism to secessionism. Thus, the transformation of CDC aligns with Koedam's (2021, p. 660) sub-category of "alternation": "A party can distort its profile over time by frequently shifting its position on an issue through ideological zigzagging." This chapter also examined in detail the blurry position of the Puigdemont administration on how to access independence, and its oscillations between a definitive rupture with the Spanish state through popular mobilization and ending the secessionist process by declaring early elections. Therefore, this ongoing oscillation until the very last moment corresponds with the concept of "ambiguity": "If a party does engage the issue, it can create uncertainty about its profile by taking up ambiguous or inconsistent stances" (Koedam, 2021, p. 660).

As for the SNP, while its traditional goal of independence is much clearer compared to CDC, we previously discussed that it has historically been a vague self-governance party, containing both gradualist and fundamentalist factions, and that it did not elaborate on the meaning of independence until its electoral victory in 2011. After the 2011 elections, the SNP initially fought for the inclusion of a "devo-max" option on the ballot. After the 2011 elections, we have seen that it first fought for the inclusion of a "devo-max" option on the ballot papers, and after this was decisively rejected by the Cameron administration, it drew a moderate vision of independence that blurred the boundaries between "devo-max" and independence. Such framing

reveals elements of “vagueness, contradiction, and ambiguity,” as highlighted by Rovny (2013).

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of the complex, dynamic, and ambiguous nature of secessionist party strategies and meaning of independence. At the same time, it aimed to contribute to one of the traditional debates in comparative politics: the tension between structure and agency. What are the boundaries of agency's influence in institutional change, and how does it shape the realm of what is "possible"? This chapter, on the other hand, elaborated the impact of agency on the form that this change takes (productive conditions), taking into account counterfactual scenarios. In doing so, it offered a perspective on how to balance the relationship between structure and agency within the literature on secessionism and party politics.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of the radicalization dynamics in the CDC and SNP territorial strategies. Showcasing their divergent paths to radicalization, it sought to understand the blurry strategies of these parties oscillating between "rupture and bargaining." Starting from a seemingly simple question, "What drives mainstream stateless nationalist political parties to adopt secessionist positions?" this study argued that the complex and dynamic phenomenon of stateless nationalist party strategies can be understood through an analysis of the interplay between structural cleavages and agent-based factors. Within this framework, the study examined how historical and "eventful" developments shaped these strategies over time. In what follows, I summarize my main research findings and their contributions, discuss the study's shortcomings, and explore the potential for future research.

Drawing on the concepts of critical antecedents and critical junctures in institutional change, this study first established the historical and analytical groundwork in Chapter 4 by identifying and contextualizing three critical antecedents: constitutional ambiguity, fiscal grievances, and the internal configuration of stateless nationalism. These antecedents prefigured the divergent trajectories of CDC and SNP, highlighting shared structural pressures as well as distinct contextual differences. For example, the "loosely framed" constitutional polities of Spain and the UK created opportunities for shifts in center-periphery relations, yet their self-governance structures exposed inherent contradictions and potential crises in the territorial dimension. Similarly, grievances over fiscal autonomy, framed as a "fiscal deficit" in Catalonia and a "democratic deficit" in

Scotland, revealed the pivotal role of economic factors in shaping nationalist narratives. Furthermore, the organizational cohesion of Scottish nationalism despite its internal diversity, stood in contrast to the fragmented and pluralistic landscape of Catalan nationalism, although CDC maintained hegemony during the first two decades of the post-Franco period. These findings underscore the structural and contextual similarities and differences between the Catalan and Scottish cases while contributing to the theoretical framework by operationalizing the concept of critical antecedents. They demonstrate how successive causes (e.g., constitutional contexts) and conditioning causes (e.g., party system evolution) interact to set the stage for radicalization during critical junctures.

The subsequent two chapters highlighted how constitutional ambiguity as a critical antecedent shaped divergent critical junctures and party strategies in the two cases of radicalization. In Catalonia, the breakdown in bargaining between the CDC-led government and the Spanish central state emerged as a pivotal critical juncture. This collapse was driven by a combination of several factors, including the failure of statute reform, the rejection of a fiscal pact, and the recentralization strategy of the PP government. These dynamics culminated in the CDC's transformation from an autonomist party to a secessionist force, influenced by party competition within secessionism, rising grassroots movements and CDC's very internal dynamics. However, this was an ambiguous secessionism became evident in the aftermath of the October 1 referendum, during the "Days of October". Neither the CDC direction nor the secessionist leadership as a whole had a clear plan or strong will for rupture, resulting in the independence initiative ending with a symbolic declaration of the Catalan republic and the removal of the secessionist government by the Spanish state.

In Scotland, the process was characterized by increased political opportunities for advancing an independence agenda. Following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the SNP's historic victory in the 2011 elections with an absolute majority paved the way for a critical juncture. The UK government's prompt acceptance of holding a legal and binding independence referendum unexpectedly placed secession at the center of Scottish politics as a tangible alternative. During this period, the SNP framed its independence strategy as a moderate and incremental project, prioritizing continuity over rupture. This approach was bolstered by the enduring dominance of gradualism within the party leadership and the SNP's hegemonic position within the broader secessionist movement. The Yes Scotland campaign, led by the SNP, successfully increased support for independence from around 30% to nearly 50%. However, the SNP leadership fell short of convincingly addressing voter concerns about the risks associated with independence, resulting in 45% of voters supporting independence on referendum day.

Chapter 7 identified The Great Recession as the second permissive condition, which intensified the center-periphery tensions and created the necessary conditions for public support for independence to reach unprecedented levels in both Catalonia and Scotland. This economic crisis acted as a catalyst for radical political options, intertwining socio-economic grievances with territorial demands and amplifying the strategic importance of fiscal sovereignty in both cases. Grassroots mobilization played a decisive role in this process. In Catalonia, pro-independence civic organizations bolstered the CDC's transformation into a secessionist force, while in Scotland, the Yes Scotland campaign grew into an autonomous social movement that significantly increased support for independence. These mobilizations not only reinforced public opinion but also shaped party strategies, aligning economic

grievances with territorial claims. This finding contributes to theoretical debates on the dynamics of multidimensional political spaces, emphasizing the strategic capacity of SNRPs raising and combining both territorial and socio-economic issues.

Chapter 8 focused on meaning-making processes of independence, highlighting the dynamic and ambiguous nature of secessionist party strategies. Both parties employed strategies of position blurring to navigate competing pressures, with CDC shifting its stance from autonomism to first sovereigntism and then to secessionism, and the SNP presenting a moderated vision of independence that blurred the lines between devo-max and full independence. Comparative insights revealed that CDC's alternation strategy was shaped by internal party competition within secessionism as well as internal party tensions between more radical and moderate sectors, leading to oscillations under Puigdemont's leadership. In contrast, the SNP's moderated framing of independence reflected its gradualist tradition and cohesive leadership under Salmond. Leadership decisions at critical junctures were pivotal in shaping the meaning and trajectory of independence, highlighting the role of agency in determining how secessionism navigated institutional constraints and political opportunities.

This dissertation contributes to the study of stateless nationalism and party politics by providing a theoretically informed and empirically grounded analysis of the territorial strategies of CDC and SNP. By critically engaging with the SNRP literature on territorial strategy developed by Newman (1996), Hepburn (2009), Massetti (2009), Massetti and Schakel (2013; 2015; 2016), Lluch (2014), Álvarez Pereira et al. (2018), and Brown Swan and McEwen (2021), it first challenges the very meaning of secession(ism) and secessionist party strategies. It reveals how CDC and SNP conceptualize self-governance, autonomy, and independence in divergent

and convergent ways, demonstrating that these understandings are neither static nor homogeneous. As questioned before by Meadwell (2009), Keating (2012), Gillespie (2016), and Della Porta and Portos (2020), the study highlights the internal tensions within secessionism, such as the divide between gradualists and fundamentalists in the SNP and the shifting dynamics between autonomists and secessionists in the CDC, offering new insights into how unity and conflict shape party strategies. This research also underscores the importance of the time variable, previously addressed by Barrio (2014), Gillespie (2015), and Elias and Mee (2017), showing how SNRPs' understandings of self-governance evolve in response to structural and conjunctural pressures, such as constitutional constraints, socio-economic crises, and grassroots mobilization. By focusing on the phenomenon of strategic ambiguity (Masseti & Schakel, 2016; Koedam, 2021) or position blurring (Rovny, 2013; Elias et al., 2015), the dissertation identifies how these changes manifest in tactical oscillations between rupture and bargaining, particularly at critical junctures. Thus, by analyzing the dynamic and multifaceted nature of territorial strategies, this study provides a framework for understanding the SNRP strategies across time and space.

The second contribution of this dissertation to theoretical debates is on the structure-agency tension in comparative politics by illustrating how secessionist strategies emerge from the dynamic interplay of institutional constraints and leadership agency. It highlights the enduring role of structural factors—such as constitutional ambiguity and fiscal grievances—in shaping the strategic options available to secessionist parties. At the same time, it demonstrates the pivotal role of agency, as seen in the CDC's oscillation between rupture and bargaining under Puigdemont and the SNP's gradualist framing of independence under Salmond. These cases reveal how structure and agency mutually condition one another: while

structural constraints define the boundaries of possibility, leadership decisions reinterpret and reshape these boundaries, through strategic actions. Its “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) on the critical decision-making moments give vivid examples what “heightened contingency” (Soifer, 2012) means during critical junctures.

While analyzing the territorial strategies of SNRPs, it also addresses a key debate in comparative politics: the tension between change and continuity. Drawing on the literature of institutional change contributed by Mahoney (2000), Greif and Laitin (2004), Mahoney and Thelen (2010), and Gerschewski (2021), among others, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how core concepts such as critical antecedents, gradual change, and critical junctures manifest in the cases of Catalonia and Scotland. For instance, the breakdown in bargaining in Catalonia and the increased opportunity structures in Scotland are shown to be critical junctures that emerge from antecedent conditions and reshape the trajectories of secessionist strategies. Furthermore, this dissertation explores the interplay between eventfulness and stability in the context of institutional change, highlighting how moments of rupture interact with enduring structural constraints to redefine the boundaries of possibility for secessionism. In doing so, it advances theoretical debates on institutional change by illustrating how incremental processes and transformative moments coexist and shape political outcomes in a mutually reinforcing manner. This contribution underscores the importance of balancing the analysis of continuity and rupture as well as the endogenous and exogenous dynamics to understand the complexity of institutional and political transformations in SNRPs.

This study employs a small-N qualitative research design, combining process tracing and in-depth interviews to analyze its research phenomenon. The

methodological choice of process tracing proved particularly effective in identifying structural dynamics, such as the interplay between antecedent conditions and critical junctures, while interviews with political elites and activists offered valuable insights into the agency-driven aspects of secessionist strategy formation. However, like any methodology, this approach is not without its limitations. As with any process tracing methodology, retrospective reconstruction of events carries the risk of confirmation bias, where evidence may be interpreted to align with pre-existing hypotheses. This highlights the importance of triangulating findings with multiple sources of evidence, an aspect that future research could explore more comprehensively. Additionally, while the comparative focus on Catalonia and Scotland enables rich, in-depth analysis, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other cases of stateless nationalism.

There are other shortcomings of this study that should be acknowledged beyond the issue of generalizability. One of these relates to the temporal scope of its analysis, particularly the treatment of the post-juncture period. While this dissertation identifies the dissolution of the Catalan secessionist government by the Spanish state and the day of the Scottish referendum as the endpoints of the respective critical junctures, it does not fully engage with the aftermath of these moments. Critical junctures are, by definition, pivotal events that reshape the trajectory of political developments, but their full implications often unfold over extended periods. By focusing primarily on the juncture itself, this study does not delve into how these moments of rupture or decision-making continued to influence party strategies, grassroots movements, and center-periphery relations in the longer term. Addressing this post-juncture period would provide valuable insights into the stability or reversal

of these transformative changes. Future research could build on this study by analyzing the enduring consequences of these critical junctures.

Another shortcoming of this study is its limited engagement with the European dimension, despite its acknowledged importance in secessionism. The influence of the European Union on SNRP strategies has been explored in various studies (Masseti, 2009; Brown Swan, 2018), and its role in shaping public opinion, economic narratives, and perceptions of legitimacy has been particularly prominent in post-independence scenarios. EU membership has often been a prominent issue during referendum debates, as seen in the Better Together campaign in Scotland, which leveraged fears of exclusion from the EU to oppose independence, and the Catalan secessionists' assumption of potential EU support for their cause. However, this study did not treat the European dimension as an independent variable, as its influence did not directly shape the radicalization of CDC and SNP strategies. Instead, the EU's role was analyzed in terms of its occasional interaction with the study's independent variables. For instance, the EU's policies regarding the economic crisis and austerity politics intersected with fiscal grievances, influencing narratives about fiscal sovereignty in both cases. While this approach aligns with the study's focus on the domestic dynamics of radicalization, future research could more thoroughly explore the interaction between the study's three main variables and the European dimension.

The external validity of this study's findings is an open question that invites further research. One avenue could involve comparing the results of this study with other independence referendum processes, such as Quebec in 1980 and 1995, and examining how the Parti Québécois navigated strategic ambiguity during these periods. Such a comparison could deepen our understanding of the conditions under

which secessionist parties employ similar or divergent strategies in democratic contexts. Another promising direction would be to explore secessionism outside the Western context, particularly in non-democratic regimes, where strategic ambiguity might serve different purposes or operate under distinct constraints. For instance, just five days before the Catalan referendum, on September 25, 2017, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq, led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), held an independence referendum in which over 90% of voters supported independence. However, the Kurdish government faced a swift and forceful response from Baghdad, including military attacks on KRG-controlled regions. In response, KDP leader Barzani abandoned the push for independence and reached an agreement with the central government. This sequence of events raises compelling questions about whether the KDP's shift from a traditionally autonomist stance to a pro-independence position—and subsequent withdrawal—can be understood as a manifestation of strategic ambiguity. Exploring cases like the KDP offers a comparative perspective that could extend the theoretical and empirical scope of this study, providing insights into how secessionist strategies are shaped by institutional, cultural, and geopolitical contexts.

Overall, this dissertation enhances our understanding of secessionism and the (re)formation of party strategies. Through a detailed examination of the cases of Catalonia and Scotland, it contributes to theoretical debates on the dynamic interplay between structure and agency, institutional change, and party politics, while offering a comparative framework that could be extended to other contexts. Beyond its academic contributions, this study highlights the enduring significance of territorial politics and fosters a discussion on the contemporary meaning of the right to self-determination. As the secessionist parties or movements examined here remain

influential political forces, and as new secessionist actors emerge in diverse political and cultural contexts, this study provides a foundation for further exploration into the transformative potential of critical junctures and the strategic dimensions of secessionism. By extending the analysis to other cases, future research can deepen our understanding of the broader patterns and possibilities of self-determination, as well as the dynamics shaping the strategies of secessionist parties in the 21st century.



APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 03.11.2021-36979

T.C.
BOĞAZİÇİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER YÜKSEK LİSANS VE DOKTORA TEZLERİ ETİK İNCELEME
KOMİSYONU
TOPLANTI KARAR TUTANAĞI

Toplantı Sayısı : 23
Toplantı Tarihi : 03.11.2021
Toplantı Saati : 14:00
Toplantı Yeri : Zoom Sanal Toplantı
Bulunanlar : Prof. Dr. Ebru Kaya, Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie, Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Yasemin Sohtorik İlkmen
Bulunmayanlar :

Atakan Çiftçi
Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler

Sayın Araştırmacı,

"Kopuş ve Pazarlık Arasında: Katalonya ve İskoçya'da Ayrılıkçı Hükümet Partilerinin Siyasi Stratejileri" başlıklı projeniz ile ilgili olarak yaptığımız SBB-EAK 2021/60 sayılı başvuru komisyonumuz tarafından 3 Kasım 2021 tarihli toplantıda incelenmiş ve uygun bulunmuştur.

Bu karar tüm üyelerin toplantıya çevrimiçi olarak katılımı ve oybirliği ile alınmıştır. COVID-19 önlemleri kapsamında kurul üyelerinden ıslak imza alınmadığı için bu onay mektubu üye ve raportör olarak Fatma Nevra Seggie tarafından bütün üyeler adına e-imzalanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla, bilgilerinizi rica ederiz.

Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra SEGGIE
ÜYE

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra SEGGIE
Raportör

SOBETİK 23 03.11.2021

Bu belge 5070 sayılı Elektronik İmza Kanununun 5. Maddesi gereğince güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Artur Mas, ex-president of Catalan governments between (2010–2016), general secretary of CDC (2001–2012), president of CDC (2012–2016), president of PDeCAT (July 2016–January 2018), Barcelona, 09.01.2023

Augusti Colomines, professor of modern history at the University of Barcelona, ex-director of CatDem, Barcelona, 15.12.2022

Aurora Madaula, deputy of Junts in the Catalan Parliament, academic, Barcelona, 29.11.2022

Brown Swan, Coree and Sijstermans, Judith, academics, experts of Scottish Politics, Edinburgh, 07.03.2024

Colin Fox, leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, 12.03.2024

Daniel Cetrà, academic, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Barcelona, 3.11.2022

Ellis Palmer, journalist, Barcelona, 15.02.2023

Eulàlia Reguant, deputy and spokesperson of CUP in the Catalan Parliament, Barcelona, 19.12.2022

Fulya Apaydın, academic, Barcelona Institute of International Studies (IBEI) and University of Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, 11.03.2022

Guillem Fuster, leader of the independentist radical left political current *Poble Lliure* and CUP, Barcelona, 21.12.2022

Jacint Jordana, director of the Barcelona Institute of International Studies (IBEI) and professor at the University of Pompeu Fabra, 28.03.2022

James Foley, academic at Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, 21.02.2024, 06.03.2024

James Kennedy, professor of political science at the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 18.03.2024

James Mitchell, professor of political science at the University of Edinburgh, online meeting, 09.02.2024

Jamie Allinson, academic, political activist, Edinburgh, 05.03.2024

Jaume Bosch, vice-president of ICV, deputy for the province of Barcelona (2003–2015, senator in the General Courts (2004–2006), Sant Feliu de Llobregat, 10.01.2023

Joaquim Colominas, militant of CDC and JNC, ex-director of CatDem, professor of political science at the University of Barcelona, Barcelona, 27.04.2022, 21.06.2022, 26.10.2022

John Swinney, president of SNP (2000–2004), member of SNP since 1979, several cabinet positions between (2007–2023), Edinburgh, 05.03.2024

Jordi Albert, deputy of ERC in the Catalan Parliament, Barcelona, 20.10.2022

Jordi Argelaguet, professor of political science at UAB, ex-president of Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió de Catalunya (Opinion Studies Center), Barcelona, 20.10.2016, 14.12.2022

Josep Lluís del Alcazar i Fabregat, leader the anticapitalist and pro-independence political party *Lluita Internacionalista*, trade union leader in CGT, 10.10.2022

Josep Pagès, national deputy of Junts, academic at UAB, Barcelona, 06.05.2022

Kenny MacAskill, former leader of SNP and later ALBA Party, online meeting, 08.03.2024

Kezia Dugdale, ex-leader of Scottish Labour, Glasgow, 11.03.2024

Manel Perez, journalist and the head of the economy department of *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona, 08.04.2022, 22.10.2022

Manuel Delgado, anthropologist at the University of Barcelona, militant of Comunistes de Catalunya, Barcelona, 07.02.2023

Marc Sanjaume, academic, University of Pompeu Fabra, member of the leadership team at *Omnium Cultural*, Barcelona, 9.11.2022

Maria Esther Alcazar i Fabregat, leader of *Lluita Internacionalista*, a candidate of CUP as a national deputy in the national elections of 2019, Barcelona, 26.05.2022

Marta Pascal, spokesperson of CDC (2015-2016), general coordinator of PDeCAT until 2018, academic, online meeting, 30.01.2023

Matthias vom Hau, academic, Barcelona Institute of International Studies (IBEI) and University of Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, 25.03.2022

Meritxell Borràs, Catalonia's Minister of Governance and Institutional Relations from June 2015 to October 2017, militant of CDC and JNC, Barcelona, 11.11.2022

Michael Keating, professor of territorial politics, Glasgow, 16.02.2024

Neus Munté, vice president of the Catalan government (2015-2017), leader of CDC, vice president of PDeCAT until 2018, Barcelona, 16.02.2023

Nicola McEwen, professor of public policy at the University of Glasgow, Glasgow, 12.02.2024

Nuria Oriols, journalist at *Ara*, CDC expert, Barcelona, 24.11.2022

Quim Bortomeu, journalist at *Ara*, ERC expert, Barcelona, 19.09.2022

Santi, militant of CUP, neighborhood activist in El Raval, Barcelona, 25.10.2022

Stephen Noon, chief strategist of Yes Scotland, Edinburgh, 19.02.2024

Ulus Atayurt, journalist and political activist, Barcelona, 14.03.2022

A trade union activist, Barcelona, 23.06.2022

An independentist activist at ANC, Barcelona, 06.07.2022

An independentist activist at *Omnium Cultural*, Barcelona, 16.07.2022

A student and neighborhood activist, Barcelona, 21.07.2022

A trade union activist and a militant of CUP, Barcelona, 04.08.2022

A militant of CUP in L'Hospitalet, L'Hospitalet, 21.09.2022

An activist at ANC, Barcelona, 27.12.2022

A student activist and a militant of CDRs, Barcelona, 14.01.2023

Interview with two SSP militants, Edinburgh, 16.03.2024

A Yes Scotland organizer and political adviser of the SNP Government, Edinburgh, 21.03.2024

A trade union activist, Edinburgh, 23.02.2024



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