Federalism and ethnic conflict management: rival hypotheses, the attitudinal missing link and comparative evidence

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Abstract

This chapter studies the role of federalism in accommodating differences in ethnically divided societies. It assesses the effects of federalism – including ‘devolution’ as well as constitutionally-embedded federal arrangements: specifically, whether federalization works for accommodating politicised, territorially-concentrated ethnic groups. Two important rival hypotheses have circulated among social scientists and political practitioners for decades. Some scholars have posited that satisfying a substantial part of aspirations for self-government mitigates opposition to the overarching political system, whilst others have contended that the most likely outcome of federalism is an exacerbation of secessionist demands (because embedded self-governing institutions allegedly induce distinctive perceptions of collective interests and of self). This chapter starts by reviewing the scientific literature on the subject. It then highlights the often-neglected role of citizens and seeks to address this problem theoretically. Finally, it discusses the empirical consistency of the main competing claims on the basis of an original comparison of four ethnically diverse regions in Canada, Spain and the United Kingdom, informed by time-series analyses.
Federalism and ethnic conflict management

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### Federalism and ethnic conflict management: rival hypotheses, the attitudinal missing link and comparative evidence

Enric Martínez-Herrera

For decades federalism has been prescribed as a recipe for overcoming ethnic conflict and separatism in divided societies with geographically-concentrated ethnic groups. Recently, however, some scholars have alerted instead that federalism can exacerbate the very problems it seeks to address. Both bodies of research primarily focus on the behaviour of collective actors such as governments, parliamentary groups, armies, parties, social movements and guerrillas. As a result, individual citizens are mostly absent from these analyses. Researchers have paid attention to particularly problematic forms of behaviour that entail a degree of contentious politics and, in particular, violence. By focusing on the consequences of ethnic conflict and secessionism, researchers have often failed to provide accounts of the intermediate mechanisms and, especially, correlative empirical evidence, about how self-rule arrangements cause both elites and ordinary individuals to engage in such forms of behaviour.

This chapter examines the effects of political decentralisation on a specific intervening variable that can be expected to explain, to a large extent, secessionist behavior. Previous research has shown that by creating or strengthening regional governments, territorial identities are created or reinforced. The impact of decentralisation on subjective support for the overarching polity amongst individuals in regions with territorially concentrated ethno-cultural groups, however, remains severely understudied. This chapter highlights the attitudinal support for the political community, and investigates whether it is enhanced or undermined through a variety of mechanisms, especially, through institutionally-induced political socialisation.

The chapter first considers the two rival hypotheses dominant in the literature, noting the absence of individuals’ feelings and belief systems in the analyses of the effects of self-
government arrangements on processes of separation and national integration. It then discusses different mechanisms by which decentralisation may produce support for political communities, both for the overarching state and for the regions associated with ethnic groups enjoying limited self-rule. It focuses on three sets of intervening variables: socialisation mechanisms, perceptions of grievances and threats, and perceptions of interests, which also depend on regional economic wealth and demographic composition. In the empirical section, the chapter assesses these theoretical hypotheses on the basis of time-series research on public attitudes in four regions that have undergone decentralisation: Catalonia and Galicia (Spain), Quebec (Canada) and Scotland (Great Britain). The concluding section draws attention to how little the social sciences know about the consequences of federalism and other forms of decentralisation for coping with ethnic conflict and dealing with secessionism.

**TWO RIVAL HYPOTHESES**

Political decentralisation is seen today as one of the state’s most prominent options for confronting demands for self-government from territorially-concentrated, culturally-differentiated groups. Most of the inhabitants and territories on earth are placed within the boundaries of states with a multiethnic, and thus, potentially plurinational nature. The plurality of cultures provides a basis for differing ethnic identifications which, in turn, can become politicised. Many multiethnic societies currently or potentially confront ethnic conflicts among their subjects that can give rise to contradictory nationalist projects. Due to the diffusion of nationalism as a model among and for cultural groups during two centuries, the odds of politicisation of cultural and ethnic identifications are very high today. In addition, the costs of repression are rising due to the increasing power of international organisations and the advent of new communications technologies. This suggests an increasing trend towards more widespread and intense claims for different sorts of self-government, including independence, all the more so when the differentiated cultural groups constitute a majority of the inhabitants in a given territory.

During the last three decades, social scientists have paid much attention to secessionism. Albeit some have welcomed, even recommended, secession, most scholars
approaching the subject have tried to supply accounts of the secessionist dynamics. They have directed their efforts at furnishing policy devices for maintaining the existing state borders, or, at the very least, for avoiding the multiple, often unintended dramatic consequences that frequently accompany the disintegration of political systems. Among the different factors scholars have considered, institutional design has been recurrent, especially federalism – which this paper treats within the wider concept of ‘political decentralisation’. Even though these scholarly efforts have yielded considerable knowledge, neither conventional wisdom nor scholarly research provides a straightforward answer. In fact, studies on the effects of federalism as a response to minority nationalism and, more in particular, to secessionism, have produced two different, opposing answers to the same question.

On the one hand, a sizeable body of scholarly work has concluded that political decentralisation can mitigate most of the problems raised by ethnic and minority nationalist conflicts (cf. Linz 1978, Lijphart 1984, 1999 and Horowitz 1985; see Linz and Stepan 1992, Gurr 1993, Hechter 2000, Saideman et al. 2002). From this angle, providing self-government in a number of substantial areas ought to appease peripheral nationalists, by diluting many of the perceived threats to their existence as a group, by removing sources of perceived grievance and by fulfilling a substantial part of their aspirations. Typically, self-government enables territorially-concentrated ethnic groups to protect and promote their own culture and values. In addition, it allows them to foster their interests both as a group and as single individuals, since self-government enables them to develop professional and political careers in the administrative and representative structures within their sphere of jurisdiction. Moreover, albeit this is not clearly stated in the literature, the satisfaction of many of their desires might be expected to facilitate genuine acceptance of and attachment to the overarching political community among ethno-cultural minorities.

On the other hand, a number of analysts suggest or openly assert that political decentralisation fosters the perception of conflict in terms of ethno-nationalism. Decentralisation provides the minority ethno-nationalist actors with resources associated with state organisations, which they can use to organise large-scale rebellion (cf. Linz 1978, 1993; see Roeder 1999, Skalnik-Leff 1999, Hale 2000, Snyder 2000, Saideman et al. 2002). Only a few scholars have directly alluded to the aspect of citizens’ attitudes. According to
some of these, the simple fact that the state classifies citizens into ethnic or ‘national’ categories and designates specific autonomous ‘national homelands’ as ‘belonging’ to particular denominations – or ‘titular’ nations – promotes attitudinal nationalism (Gorenburg 1999; Brubaker & Cooper 2000).

Other scholars have added that decentralised institutions controlled by minority nationalist groups actually enable such groups to indoctrinate the population with nationalist beliefs and values by using the powerful communicative machinery of the state (Diez-Medrano 1995, cf. Clarke et al. 2000). In addition, by introducing new arenas of electoral competition, political decentralisation sets a structure of political opportunities that, by and large, renders attaining positions in parliament and government far easier than in centralised states (Pallarés et al. 1997; Pallarés & Keating 2003). In all the cases considered in my research, secessionist peripheral nationalism was weaker in the electoral ground before decentralisation than afterwards. Once secessionist entrepreneurs benefit from these resources, they can spread their messages more effectively, convincing their potential followers that the nationalist project is worthwhile (cf. Hechter 1987; a propos the electoral success of the Partie Québécois and a subsequent rising of nationalist attitudes, cf. Keating 1996 and Meldensohn 2002). In addition, large-N comparative research has shown that the presence of regional, non-state wide parties, is a key predictor of ethnic conflict and secessionism (Brancati 2006). Hence, from this perspective, political decentralisation is expected to increase rejection of the overarching political community among the peripheral population and the exacerbation of conflict.

**The Citizens as Missing Link**

Two alternative, diametrically opposed general hypotheses have thus been posited with regard to the effects of political decentralisation. Nevertheless, scientific analysis has largely neglected the feelings of individuals that predate the commencement of separatist conflict and/or the process of separation itself. Scholars have generally focused on contentious ethnic politics, ranging from protest to coups d’état – with or without significant bloodshed – to outright civil war, but the preceding phases of escalation have been overlooked. Besides, this focus places the interaction of collective actors, such as
governments, parties, armies, social movements and guerrillas before individual attitudes and behaviour. As a result, analyses have only seldom made reference to citizens’ feelings for their political communities. In addition, analyses referring to citizens’ preferences have very seldom been backed with appropriate evidence – at the level of citizens’ belief systems – and none of these has ever been properly tested.

Such is the case both for those foreseeing an enhancement of citizens’ subjective integration in the overarching polity, and for those worried about an eventual further deepening of the centre-periphery cleavage that might lead to stronger secessionist claims and to rebellion. Amongst the former, Horowitz (1985) supplies evidence about macro-processes at a systems level, such as ethnically based coups d’état and civil wars in Africa and Asia. Noticeably, he analyses the behaviour of political elites and collective actors such as governments, political parties and armies. Likewise, Lijphart (1984, 1999), who stresses the role of elites in striking deals while keeping their linguistic or religious constituencies segregated, pays little attention to citizens’ support for the overarching polity. Yet another prominent example, Gurr (1993, with Moore 1997) gets closer to citizens’ conduct, for he considers trends of aggregate contentious behaviour – both protest and rebellion – and the strength of minority group organisations. Even so, he never considers attitudes such as ethnic and/or national identification.

This is much the same among those scholars who foresee the further erosion of support for the overarching polity. Neither Leff (1999), Roeder (1999) nor Snyder (2000), for instance, are directly concerned about citizens’ support. Some may, on occasion, stress the importance of nationalist mass mobilisations in the former socialist countries (Bunce 1995). Further, some have explicitly pointed to the importance of mass attitudes towards the country and the role of nested territorial governments in shaping them (Diez-Medrano 1995, Gorenburg 1999, Brubaker and Cooper 2000, Clarke et al. 2000). Yet, at the very best, these scholars have formulated a theoretical hypothesis, but not tested it. Since survey methodology was quite unusual in these societies before and during the collapse of the real socialist regimes, they cannot verify the alleged rise of nationalist feelings amongst populations.
Thus, in most accounts of secession processes, citizens are absent. For one thing, one might be surprised by this absence from a democratic normative viewpoint. As long as most of the polity break-ups of the last decades accompanied the breakdowns of autocratic regimes in transition to liberal democracy, one could expect that a stronger attention would have been paid to citizens’ preferences and conduct. This paradox can probably be accounted for by the argument that most democratic transitions and secessions were led by the same bureaucratic elites and state apparatuses that had been ruling the respective republics during the ancien régime, with little room for genuine, autonomous political opposition and mass mobilisation. In this sense, it seems significant, too, that hardly any of the secession processes from former the Yugoslavian and Soviet autonomous republics involved a genuinely democratic, contested referendum on self-determination. Indeed, almost all secessions were decided by the republics’ elites ‘holding on to the state structure […] and defending the [republic] boundaries irrespective of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural borders’ (Linz 1993: 362).

Having said this, one may also be astonished at the absence of citizen attitudes and behaviour from a methodological standpoint. For citizens can also play a significant part, to say the least, in the political process. First of all, had self-determination referenda been held with guarantees for genuine contestation, citizens preferences would have been allowed to play an all-important role. Ironically, the very absence of these plebiscites might well have to do with expectations about the content of mass attitudes among political leaders. Like a self-undermining prophecy, the speed with which the Croatian authorities, for example, declared independence might, to a large extent, be explained by their concern that such a contested referendum was to be held. Not only were substantial parts of the territory administrated by Croatia mainly inhabited by Serbs (e.g., the Krajina), but many ethnic Croats had been evolving towards a Yugoslavian identification during the last decades before the secession process started (Burg & Berbaum 1989; Pavkovic 2000). In addition,

1 I use Dahl’s (1971) term ‘contestation’. Dahl considers that one main characteristic of democracy – or real-world ‘poliarchy’ – is the possibility of choosing between different options, all which have had similar opportunities to be advocated. This induces a fair competition between two or more options with a real public debate.
the obsession with ethnic cleansing policies is clearly related to rulers’ worry about the political expression of citizen preferences.

A second obvious methodological reason to take an interest in citizens’ orientations towards their political communities is that they may be a main factor for explaining and predicting voting behaviour in party systems organised around an ethno-cultural cleavage. In competitive political systems, the power basis of regional leadership, and thus the conduct of the elites should also be accounted for, to an extent at least, by mass attitudes. However, even if one might feel somewhat sceptical about democratic manners in young democracies, given the multiethnic character of the large majority of new states, one should take into account that citizens’ views are the grounds for the rise of contentious forms of political behaviour such as protest and rebellion. For although during the 1990s many cases of rebellion were organised from public institutions such as autonomous republics and regions, other historical cases of rebellion such as guerrilla movements as well as most protest movements have emerged from the grass-roots. In effect, most social movements greatly depend on citizens’ availability, since the will of individuals constitutes their main source and resource of power (Tarrow 1994). More generally, political attitudes are a resource to be activated or not, depending upon the needs, the organizational capabilities, and the structures of political opportunity which political entrepreneurs and the citizens themselves face at every particular conjuncture.

In a nutshell, the literature about the effects of political decentralisation on ethnic conflict has not paid enough attention to citizens’ belief systems, and when it has alluded to them, empirical evidence has not been sufficient. In this chapter I discuss the empirical evidence regarding the soundness of hypotheses about the impact of decentralisation on conflicts of this kind.

FROM NATION-BUILDING TO BUILDING SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL COMMUNITIES

While decentralising political power, central states generally transfer jurisdiction over education and culture to regional governments, and they can also transfer powers over the mass media on a territorial basis. In doing so, they renounce one of the main instruments of traditional nation-building and empower regional governments in precisely this regard. The
literature on ‘nation-building’ has examined the intentional production and dissemination of national sentiments from the state (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, Rokkan 1971, 1975). Nation-builders use the state resources in a top-down process with the aim of spreading feelings of attachment to the ‘nation-state’ political community. This phenomenon is in line with current constructivist accounts that treat nationhood as a cultural product that certain agents create and circulate (Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm 1983, Brubaker 1996).

The induction ‘from above’ of feelings of identification with a political community can be regarded as the product of institutions operating in two different, though not incompatible, ways: as agencies and as structures of social interaction (Skocpol 1985; Almond 1988). According to the literature on political socialisation, they respectively work as socialisation agencies and socialisation milieus (Percheron 1985, 1993). These two concepts are useful to analyse different processes and mechanisms in operation: agencies actively transmit beliefs and values and indoctrinate individuals, who are regarded as passive recipients, mere objects of the socialisation process; by contrast, in milieus, individuals actively familiarise themselves with pieces of information from the environment(s) that they process and assimilate, and thereby act as non-passive agents of their own socialisation (cf. Percheron 1985), particularly through experiencing (Eckstein 1988). A third factor that could have consequences on shaping identification with political communities are policies aimed at promoting a language. Such policies can foster cultural nationalism, and thereby bolster or undermine support for the overarching polity.

Regional governments also develop nation-building processes. Some authors implicitly or explicitly adopt this model for Belgium and Spain. Citizens do not only experience spontaneously their everyday belonging to regional political structures (Karmis & Gaignon 1996), but regional governments also actively promote regional identities (Moreno 2001 [1997], Maddens et al. 1998, Martinez-Herrera 2002, Rocher 2002, Miley 2006). As a matter of fact, previous research has shown that by creating or strengthening regional governments, territorial identities are created or reinforced (Martínez-Herrera 1999, 2002). Some observers of Soviet and post-Soviet politics have highlighted two

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2 For a review of the recent literature about political socialisation, see Sapiro 2004.
mutually enforcing ways in which political engineering generates socio-political categories of vision and division of the social world. According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 26), the Soviet state established many autonomous republics and regions and regarded them as ‘national homelands’, ‘each “belonging” to a particular ethnonational group’. Many of the ‘titular’ ‘national’ groups (and, to start with, their political elites) considered themselves as ‘owning’ the republics vis-à-vis other inhabitants under their jurisdiction (cf. Bunce 1995). Second, individuals were formally ascribed to specific ethno-national groups, so that Soviet citizens learnt to distinguish between ‘titular’ and ‘non-titular’ citizens of the republics (Brubaker 1996; Gorenburg 1999).

Albeit autonomous familiarisation with the structural and cultural social context is important, traditional nation-building mostly relies on political socialisation via transmission of (indoctrination into) beliefs and values. In regions whose political elites hold competing national projects, the transfer of powers over education – and in some cases, mass media – entails that the balance in traditional nation-building shifts dramatically from the central to the regional layer of government. This is stressed further if the other traditional means for spreading the statewide national project are also weakened – in particular, where conscripted armies are replaced by professional armies and state broadcasting media are privatised. While states renounce using these mechanisms, regional government gain, or often seize, the opportunity to do so.

In this situation, central states seem to rely on alternative ways for building the support for the overarching, statewide political community. As far as political socialisation is concerned, this would not rest so much on transmission- Indoctrination mechanisms but rather on citizens’ experiences of and familiarisation with the political settings. This is a second mechanism that has not been attached enough importance in traditional nation-building and has more to do with more ‘banal’ processes of internalisation of norms and values (Billig 1995). This consists of softer but persistent ways of nationalist socialization by the state and other agencies, which can take place without a clear purpose of instilling certain political ideas in the population. Yet even if unintended, this would not mean that they are less effective than outright deliberate inculcation of ideas and values. In this sort of process, government agents take for granted support for the political community by its members and make soft appeals to these feelings whenever possible – for instance, in
international sporting competitions. Moreover, in the decentralised polity, individual citizens would experience and internalise their interaction with the contexts set by both the statewide and the substate layers of government (Martínez-Herrera 2002). However, as will be argued next, the hope would be that their experience with the statewide institutions would be more psychologically rewarding in the decentralised state than in the centralised one, thus producing positive feelings towards the overarching state.

To start with, it is expected that responsive policies vis-à-vis the peripheral demands and claims for recognition of cultural demands and, more specifically, self-government will reduce perceptions of unfair treatment from the ‘centre’ in the ‘periphery’ (cf. Linz 1993, Gurr 1993). Identification with a group is only produced if it comes out as positive and psychologically beneficent for the individual (Bloom 1990, Lawler 1992). The perception of grievances from the majority by a minority tends to make members of the minority place cognitive filters towards positive experiences and messages involving the overarching polity. Were this true, the removal of such grievances should facilitate the assimilation of positive messages and experiences and hence the production of positive feelings. Second, and in the same vein, where there has been some sort of perceived or actual discrimination in job opportunities, especially in the public sector (e.g. Quebec and Northern Ireland), the creation of self-rulled regional administrations should also reduce feelings of grievance and economic threat (cf. Hechter 1987). Third, by enabling minorities in the state to be majorities in their regions, the establishment of regional institutions for representation and government should mitigate feelings of political marginalization in the overarching state. Fourth, in psychological terms, the ‘recognition’ and institutionalisation of regional cultures should provide the feeling that the ‘centre’ prises both these cultures and the ethnocultural traits of their individual holders (Taylor 1994). Through all these paths, then, political decentralisation ought to bring the members of the regionally based minority to feel no longer harmed, to feel safer (concerning both their distinctive culture and themselves) and, thus, to develop favourable affective feelings towards the overarching state.
THE EXPERIENCE OF FOUR WESTERN REGIONS IN THREE DECENTRALISING STATES

To adjudicate among these theoretical developments, this paper summarizes the main results of empirical research upon long-term time series of public opinion (Martínez Herrera 2005). The author has analysed the developments of attitudinal support for the political community during a period of between twenty and thirty years in four regions that are culturally differentiated from the majority population of their states and that have nationalist movements of their own. These regions are Catalonia and Galicia in Spain, Quebec in Canada and Scotland in the United Kingdom. All of them gained or increased – either *de jure* or *de facto* – their self-government powers from the 1970s. The study focuses on the alleged effects of political decentralisation and applies multivariate techniques to control the effects of other theoretically relevant variables, namely, democratisation, nationalist regional governments, re-centralisation processes, and a number of political events invoked by the specialised literature. In addition, it inquires into the effects of the interaction between political decentralisation and other social contextual factors on support for the overarching polities.

Building on Easton (1965, 1975), this paper refers to ‘political community’ as the set of people who are collectively ruled and represented by the structures of a political system. Diffuse support for the political community is the long-term affective attachment and generic loyalty to the existence of that community, which makes groups with disparate political aspirations readily accept their belonging to the polity even if their demands may remain unsatisfied most of the time. According to Easton (1975), identification with political communities appears to be the main expression of this legitimacy or diffuse support, although we can also add other expressions, such as supporting the existence of that political community.

The results of the author’s research cast doubts on expectations about political decentralisation as an effective means for further integrating territorially-concentrated ethno-cultural minorities into the statewide political community under some specific economic conditions. The evidence shows that political decentralisation produces, as expected, changes in population support for the overarching polity. However, it also shows that these effects are not univocal. The figures in Table 1 are standardised regression
coefficients of the effects of the independent variable and other control variables on the attitudinal complete lack of support for the overarching polity (Canada, Spain and the United Kingdom). This lack of support is measured as exclusive identification with the region (see Martínez-Herrera 2002) and/or support for independence/separation. The sign of the coefficients for political decentralisation means that whilst in Galicia decentralisation has substantially contributed to integrate subjectively peripheral nationalist citizens into their host polity, in the other three regions decentralisation has further undermined support for the state political community.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Galicia</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Catalonia</th>
<th>Quebec</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autocracy</td>
<td>0.66 ***</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0.76 ***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralisation</td>
<td>-0.39 ***</td>
<td>0.42 ***</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1.08 ***</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meech Accord</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.78 ***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meech Failure</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.33 ***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatcher 3rd Gov</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1.04 ***</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poll Tax90</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.23 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatGov_Q</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.10 *</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref79_S/Ref80_Q</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.10 *</td>
<td>-0.26 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympics</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.36 ***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample (adjusted)</td>
<td>79-02</td>
<td>86-03</td>
<td>79-03</td>
<td>71-02</td>
<td>74-03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sign.: *** .01; ** .05; *.10; ns not significant

The data are modelled with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. The control variables shown in the table are those yielding statistically significant effects. These comprise the degree of autocracy-democracy in the polity (as measured by Freedom House) and a wide battery of dummies for events: two representing the political atmosphere in Canada during the attainment and subsequent crisis of the Meech Lake constitutional accord; one representing the period of the third government of Ms Thatcher in Great Britain; one for the year when the Poll Tax was enforced in Scotland; one for the years when the Parti Quebecois held the provincial government of Quebec (NatGov_Q); one for the referenda in Scotland (1979, on self-rule) and Quebec (1980, on the relationship between Quebec and Canada at large); and another one for the year in which the Olympic Games took place in Spain (for further details, see Martínez-Herrera 2005).
The reason for this difference seems to lie in a permutation (interaction) with contextual factors. These are regional economic wealth as compared with the host country at large and the presence of ‘minorities within the minorities’. As wealth tends to attract economic migrants, minorities within the minorities tend to be large in the wealthy regions. It is plausible to hypothesize that the relative economic wealth of a region as compared with the overarching state would shift the direction of the effects of political decentralisation in support for the state polity. When the region is economically advantaged as compared to the country average, it attracts important numbers of people from the rest of the country – and often also from abroad – to live and work there. Thus, people identified with the regionally concentrated ethno-cultural minority may well experience the growing presence of ‘outsider’ economic immigrants – and not just entrepreneurs and public officials – to their affluent region as an alien ‘encroachment’. Massive influxes of migrants are prone to engender the perception of ethnic competition and thus ethnic conflict (Barth 1976). Hence natives may well be tempted to think about regional independence as a way to protect their habitat (Laitin 1991).

Political decentralisation typically comes with the protection and fostering of local cultures. However, this protection, which in principle are aimed at reassuring the minority about threats to their cultural survival and to the prospect of discrimination on the basis of their membership in the minority group, may nevertheless have unintended consequences. For such protection creates for the cultural minority a milieu in which they play with advantage in the competition for scarce resources – especially for jobs, subsidies and high status positions in relation to the public sector and other publicly intervened areas (Hardin 1995). As a result, members of the minority may be further inclined to expand that protected milieu, and separation may seem to be the top of the ladder in this regard.

At the same time, in line with the theoretical model of economic overdevelopment, peripheral economic elites of the relatively wealthier region hold different material interests than the elites that dominate the political centre. As a consequence, they promote and

\[4\] Linz (1981) coined the expression ‘peripheries within the periphery’.
patronise the peripheral nationalist intelligentsia so that the latter, in turn, can mobilise the wider regional population in their favour (Laitin 1991, Bollen & Diez-Medrano 1998). Political decentralisation makes the structure of political opportunities much more favourable for the higher-status groups and the nationalist intelligentsia of the culturally differentiated affluent regions for mobilising their targeted followers. With the prospects of much easier competition and institutional political representation (Pallarés et al. 1997, Pallarés & Keating 2003), obtaining access to public resources that are useful for political mobilisation and perhaps seizing regional power, higher-status groups have much more incentive to invest efforts in promoting the nationalist intelligentsia. Even though most people identified with the regionally concentrated ethno-cultural minority do not have the same economic interests as the higher status-groups, given their inclination to perceive that their habitat is invaded by aliens and the strong temptation to further reinforce the barriers for access to regional resources, they may well be tempted to follow the higher-status groups and intelligentsia.

There is a general inclination of nested organisations to prise the achievements as theirs while putting the blame for problems on the nest organisation that they belong to (Lawler 1992) – an inclination that is further stressed as interests diverge. The consequence of these differentiated interests for political socialisation is that increasingly important regional socialisation agencies – namely, the educational public institutions and, where applicable, regionally controlled mass media – tend to spread positive messages of support for the region while ignoring or criticising the overarching state and community (cf. Keating 2001).

The results in the empirical cases studied here lend credence to this hypothesis. In terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, between 1980 and 2002, Catalonia was the third wealthiest region in Spain out of seventeen, while Galicia ranked fourteenth. Thus, the former was an overdeveloped region with respect to the Spanish average, whilst the latter was clearly underdeveloped. These positions of relative advantage or disadvantage as compared to the national average remained nearly constant before and after decentralization. In turn, in 2000, the per capita wealth of Quebec was placed on the median of the distribution of the provinces and territories of Canada. Finally, the same year,
Scotland ranked as the fourth out of twelve (England being divided into NUTS administrative regions) and within the third quartile for Britain.\(^5\)

The degree of relative economic success is roughly paralleled by the presence of minorities within the minorities. In 2002, the rate of inhabitants born outside the region (either in other regions of the same country or abroad) was 36 per cent in Catalonia, 13 in Scotland, and only 5 per cent in Galicia. These figures do not include the direct offspring of immigrants. Minorities can also consist of people born in the region but who are ethnically different from the majority. If we consider those whose mother tongue is different from the traditional territorial language, in 2001 they constituted nearly 57 per cent in Catalonia and 19 per cent in Quebec.\(^6\) Certainly, nationalist parties of Catalonia, Galicia, Quebec and Scotland often present themselves as immigrant-friendly. Yet this does not preclude the fact that their members and sympathisers often look at minorities within minorities in a less friendly manner.

Figure 1 displays the relationship between the relative wealth of the cases within their host countries and the standardised effect of political decentralisation on the denial of support for the host political communities. The relative affluence is given in quartiles on the distribution of the regions within their host country in terms of GDP per capita. For Scotland both the effect on rejection of British identification and on preferences for independence are considered. In effect, one can notice a very strong correlation between relative affluence and the outcomes of decentralisation (Pearson’s \(r = .95\)). Thus, an interaction of relative wealth with decentralisation can account for the declining support for the host polities in Catalonia, Scotland and Quebec whereas in Galicia such support has increased.

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\(^5\) For economic data on the British, Canadian and Spanish regions, see, respectively, the database ‘Regio’, (Eurostat), Statistics Canada (www.statcan.ca) and Instituto Nacional de Estadística (www.ine.es). However, were the oil revenues of the administrative region of the North Sea to be imputed to Scotland, this would become one of the two richest regions in the country, on the same footing as London.
The implication from these four regions is that relatively poor culturally differentiated regions, such as Galicia, can increase their integration into the overarching polity as a result of political decentralisation, which is in accordance with the hypothesis of a strand of literature. Yet, in accordance with the rival body of literature, political decentralisation in relatively wealthy culturally differentiated regional minorities, such as Catalonia, Quebec and Scotland, seems to further fuel inclinations for separation.

6 For the Spanish regions, the figures are drawn from opinion surveys conducted by the CIS, as censuses do not ask about where parents were born. Instead, the data for Scotland and Quebec come from censuses.
IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND POLICY

Traditional nation-building relies heavily on political socialisation via transmission of beliefs and values, carried out to a large extent by means of educational, cultural and, where available, substate mass media policies. When states decentralise power, they usually surrender jurisdiction over these policies to regional governments. As a result, in regions where political and public officials pursue competing national projects, this transfer of jurisdiction implies that the balance in traditional nation-building resources shifts to the regional side. This rebalancing of the “socialisation leverage” is more dramatic insofar as other traditional means for spreading the statewide project of political community are simultaneously undermined – in particular, where military conscription disappears and state broadcasting media are privatised.

In this scenario, states must rely on alternative means for generating support for the overarching political community. Such a new approach might include forms of political socialisation that do not rest so much on mechanisms of belief and value inculcation targeting passive (young) subjects but rather would depend upon the active experiences of individuals within their political contexts. This alternative mechanism has not been paid enough attention in the literature on nation-building. It consists of more subtle processes of norm and value internalisation. In the decentralised polity, the hypothesis goes, individuals would experience and internalise their interaction with contexts set by both the statewide and the sub-state layers of government.

Those in charge of the overarching state would hope that the actual experience of the regional citizens with the statewide institutions is more psychologically rewarding in the decentralised state than in the centralised one. This more rewarding experience would in turn facilitate the production of positive feelings towards the overarching polity. State authorities that agree to transfer powers to the regional elites expect that policies responsive to claims of regional elites will mitigate feelings of collective grievance, individual economic risk, political alienation and perceptions of contempt for minority cultures in the ‘periphery’. In this vein, political decentralisation ought to appease the members of the regionally based minority, allowing them to feel more comfortable in the overarching polity (no longer harmed, more secure, recognised) and, hence, to develop positive affective
feelings towards the overall state. However, such hopes ignore the tendency of actors in
nested institutions to take credit for the achievements of public policy while displacing
blame for troubles onto the nest organisation in which they are embedded, resulting in the
persistence and perhaps even exacerbation of negative perceptions towards the overarching
polity.

The results of the author’s research with long-term time series of public opinion cast
doubts on these hopes. The author has analysed the developments of attitudinal support for
the political community in four western regions that are culturally differentiated from the
majority population of their states and have nationalist movements of their own. By
deploying a multivariate research design, the effects of political decentralisation are
analysed while controlling for the effects of other theoretically relevant variables and
considering some interaction effects between decentralisation and other social contextual
factors.

The results show that political decentralisation actually produces effects on
population support for the host, statewide political communities. However, these effects are
not univocal. Whilst in Galicia decentralisation has substantially contributed to integrate
subjectively peripheral nationalist citizens in their overarching polity, the multivariate
analysis points to a further eroding of support for the state political community in the other
three regions. The reason for this difference seems to lie in an interaction with certain
contextual factors, which comprise both regional economic wealth as compared with the
host country at large and the presence of minorities within the minorities, a presence that
tends to increase as the regions are richer and thus attract economic migrants. As a
consequence, it is plausible that the relative regional wealth vis-à-vis the average wealth of
the whole society radically affects the impact of decentralisation on support for the
overarching polity. Political decentralisation generally facilitates protection of the local
culture. However, this protection may have unintended consequences; for it creates a
protected milieu for the cultural minority – one in which they have a definite advantage in
the competition for scarce resources, especially with respect to labour market opportunities
in the public and service sectors. As a result, members of the minority community may be
tempted to expand their protected milieu, with secession as the ultimate panacea.
In addition, political decentralisation makes the structure of political opportunities much more favourable for high-status groups with regional-specific interests, as well as for the local intelligentsia who can take advantage of the situation to try to indoctrinate and mobilise the regional population against the centre. Once opportunities of gaining institutional representation, of accessing public resources useful for political mobilisation, and of seizing regional power increase, high-status groups become more willing to promote the nationalist intelligentsia. Consequently, in terms of political socialisation, increasingly important regional agencies – most significantly, public educational institutions and, where applicable, regionally controlled mass media – will tend to inculcate positive attitudes towards the region while ignoring or downplaying the overarching state and its community. The general tendency of elites in nested organisations to claim achievements as theirs while displacing the blame for problems on the nest organisation is reinforced as interests diverge.

The empirical findings of the author elsewhere elaborated in detail clearly lend credence to the claim that political decentralisation enhances integration into the overarching polity when it comes to relatively poor culturally differentiated regions such as Galicia, in accordance with the hypothesis of an important strand of the literature. Conversely, in accordance with the general claim of the rival camp in the literature, political decentralisation in relatively wealthy culturally differentiated regional minorities, such as Catalonia, Quebec and Scotland, appears to fuel inclinations in favor of separation. These results should invite the social scientific community to reconsider the theoretical claims that abound in the field, in the light of solid empirical data. An immediate task in just such a direction would be to expand this analysis to include more regions, particularly, in non-western societies.

The implications also might invite us to take carefully ongoing tendencies to advice or prescribe territorial federalisation to countries with diverse territorially-concentrated ethno-cultural groups that are a majority in relatively rich areas, such as Iraq (concerning the Kurds) or Bolivia (concerning Santa Cruz). Even though the extrapolation of the experience of the four western regions examined here ought to be considered carefully too, it should suffice to warn both academics and practitioners about the danger of long-run further exacerbation of sectarian tensions in the form of centre-periphery conflict as long as
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self-government on a territorial bases is created or augmented in the relatively wealthy regions. In this sense, alternatives to both self-government and territorial self-government ought also to be pondered.

REFERENCES


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