

Ethnopolitics

Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics

ISSN: 1744-9057 (Print) 1744-9065 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/reno20>

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To cite this article: Montserrat Guibernau (2013) Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy, *Ethnopolitics*, 12:4, 368-393, DOI: [10.1080/17449057.2013.843245](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2013.843245)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2013.843245>



Published online: 21 Oct 2013.



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SYMPOSIUM

Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy

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ABSTRACT The article is divided into four main parts. First it offers a theoretical framework, which includes key concepts such as nation, state and nation without state. Second, it examines the origins of modern Catalan nationalism by tracing back its roots to Franco's dictatorship and the subsequent transition to democracy. Third, it analyses the reasons behind the qualitative shift from devolution to secession embodied in the rise of a novel bottom-up Catalan secessionist movement, which has developed in the last five years or so. This movement supports the idea of holding a referendum on Catalan independence from Spain—so far, strictly forbidden by the Spanish state. This part also analyses the impediments to a 'referendum' on Catalan independence founded upon the Spanish Constitution. The final part focuses on the main arguments invoked by Catalans when prompted to account for the rise of secessionism, only recently introduced into the Catalan political landscape.

PART 1

Concepts

To be or not to be recognized as a nation entails different rights for the community that claims to be one. I define the nation as a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future, and claiming the right to rule itself (Guibernau, 1998, p. 14; see also Keating, 2001). To define a specific community as a nation involves the more or less explicit acceptance of the legitimacy of the state that claims to represent it or, if the nation does not possess a state of its own, it then implicitly acknowledges the nation's right to self-government involving some degree of political autonomy which may or may not lead to a claim for independence. The nation, however, cannot be viewed in isolation and it is important to establish a clear distinction between the concepts of 'state', 'nation-state' and 'nationalism'. By 'state', taking Weber's definition (Weber,

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1948, p. 78), I refer to 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory', although not all states have successfully accomplished this, and some of them have not even aspired to accomplish it. The nation-state is a modern political institution, characterized by the formation of a kind of state that has the monopoly of what it claims to be the legitimate use of force within a clearly demarcated territory and seeks to unite the people subject to its rule by means of cultural homogenization.

By 'nations without states' I refer to nations, which in spite of having their territories included within the boundaries of one or more states, by and large do not identify with them. The members of a nation lacking a state of their own regard the state containing them as alien, and maintain a separate sense of national identity. Self-determination is sometimes understood as political autonomy, in other cases it stops short of independence, and often involves the right to secede (Horowitz, 1985; Connor, 1994; Brubaker, 1996; Cordell & Wolff, 2010). The state may or may not recognize the status of its national minorities as nations (Kymlicka, 2001). For instance, the United Kingdom recognizes Scotland and Wales as nations, while Spain does not recognize Catalonia and the Basque Country as nations. Instead, it refers to them as Autonomous Communities (AACC).

'Nationalism' is both a political ideology and a sentiment of belonging to a community whose members identify with a set of symbols, beliefs and ways of life, and have the will to decide upon their common political destiny. It is very important to acknowledge the Janus-faced nature of nationalism as a doctrine sometimes associated with xenophobia, racism, ethnic cleansing and discrimination of the different, and which in some other circumstances stands up as a political ideology defending the right of nations to exist and evolve culturally and politically while vigorously promoting a democratic outlook and complying with human rights. Thus, nationalism, on some occasions, is associated with backward ethnic political discourses, whereas in others, it stands as a new progressive social movement in favour of the emancipation of peoples (Guibernau, 1998; Hechter, 2000).

The Nation-state and Power

It is not until the nineteenth century that we find a Europe divided into clearly defined nation-states; even as late as 1871 in the case of Italy and Germany. It is precisely from this period onwards that the nation-state becomes recognized as the unit of political power par excellence, its form being taken as a model not only in Western Europe, but also in the rest of the world. In the twenty-first century, the nation-state remains the primary actor in international relations; being a sovereign nation-state seems to be the chief international status symbol as well as to confer entrance to the world society.

We should understand the proliferation of international institutions, such as the League of Nations after the First World War, as an expression of an acknowledged need for the reflexive monitoring of a worldwide system of states that furthered, rather than diminished, the primacy of the nation-state as the universal political form of the current era. The long-term effect of the development of supranational agents, rather than undermining the relevance of the nation-state, led it to the fore. This is because 'a state cannot become sovereign except within a system of other sovereign states, its sovereignty being acknowledged by them; in this there is a strong pressure towards mutual recognition as equals, whatever the factual situation in respect of differential power' (Giddens, 1985, pp. 281–282).

In the whole process of nation-state formation, state power plays a fundamental role; it is mainly by means of state power (Breuilly, 1993, p. 367) that territories become united through annexation or conquest. The power of the state stands in sharp contrast to the powerlessness of the nations included within its boundaries. Ultimately, state power determines the status and degree of recognition of national minorities. State power is also fundamental to a definition of the modern state through both its clear boundaries and its capacity to maintain them by the monopoly of violence (Treitschke, 1914, p. 39). This is exerted inside the boundaries of the nation-state, but violence is also a means to defend the nation-state's interests against those of other nation-states. The power of the state (Coakley, 2013) upon its citizens is exerted in several ways.

First, by its capacity to impose and collect taxes, which is one of the primary and more central features of the state and something that affects the day-to-day life of its citizens.

Second, in establishing the rights and duties of its citizens, the state empowers while simultaneously constraining them.

Third, thanks to the development of technology, the modern state has increased and sophisticated its ability to control its citizens. The enormous expansion of the state's scope allows for the classification of citizens according to their gender, wealth, religion, age, and so on, distinguishing between healthy, sick, insane, productive or unproductive, ethnic minorities and autochthonous. All this leads to an increasing presence of the state in everyday life. The concept of 'the normalizing society' refers to a society in which the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect and, according to Foucault, these are on the advance (Foucault, 2003 [1997], p. 40). In his view the recourse to sovereignty against discipline will not enable us to limit the effects of disciplinary power. The only alternative is looking for a new right, which is both anti-disciplinary and emancipated from the principle of sovereignty.

Fourth, the modern state also has the power to control two elements that, through their role in reproducing and modifying culture, become crucial in the homogenization of its population; these are the media and education. Gellner stresses the unprecedented importance of communication and culture in industrial societies—both key features in his theory of nationalism. He writes: 'Culture is now the necessary shared medium, the life-blood or perhaps rather the minimal shared atmosphere, within which alone the members of the society can breathe and survive and produce' (Gellner, 1983, pp. 37–38). According to him, culture cannot survive without its own political shell: the state (Gellner, 1983, p. 143). This is a crucial argument when considering the shift from devolution to secession within Catalan society because it implies that a culture is unable to survive and develop if it lacks its own state. This is so because the cultural homogenization carried out by the state aims at eventually replacing the various identities of its citizens by a shared identity. By promoting a specific language, culture and ways of life, the state strengthens and fosters the emergence of a sense of community and shared solidarity within its borders, which tends to result in the weakening—or even annihilation—of vernacular culture and language.

During the transition to democracy, Catalan majority nationalism defended the idea that the 'one nation, one state' theory was not a *sine qua non* condition for a nation to reach its full development. Consequently, Catalan majority nationalism stood up in favour of devolution (greater devolution than they currently enjoyed) and did not contemplate secession. However, this perception has changed since 2000. But what has prompted such a significant shift in Catalan public opinion? Why have Catalans turned to secession after years of

defending devolution? These are questions that we shall explore later on when examining the main arguments invoked by Catalans to explain the current rise of secessionism.

When faced with the inclusion of different nations or parts of nations within a single state, usually one nation predominates above the others. The problem is that what would be a theoretically plausible alternative—several nations coexisting under the rule of a single state which evenly cares for them all—tends to evolve into a situation in which the state displays varying degrees of recognition of its national minorities, or none at all, while almost invariably engaging in processes of cultural and linguistic homogenization. This is so because the state, to uphold its legitimacy, seeks to create a nation coextensive with its territory.

Furthermore, it is always easier for the state to rule if it manages to create a sense of community and shared identity among the people subject to its power. But, if this is the case in many European states containing small nations or parts of nations, such as Catalonia in Spain, Scotland in Britain and Flanders in Belgium, a further point could be raised in connection with the origin of many post-colonial states—or ‘state-nations’—founded upon state apparatuses originally established by the colonizers without any regard for the cultural units they included. Under these circumstances, nationalism has usually played an important part in activating social movements stimulating the transition to independent statehood. However, quite often, many problems emerge as nationalism reveals itself as a device employed by elites seeking state power while unable to provide a single ‘myth of origin’ endowed with traits and beliefs with which citizens—who belong to different cultures—can identify.

When nation and state are not coextensive, there are two potential outcomes. First, the state may be successful in its attempt and assimilate the different nations or parts of nations existing within its territory. This involves the total or practical annihilation of national minority cultures and their replacement by the state’s official culture, allowing for the formation of a coextensive nation-state.

Second, if the state fails to assimilate its national minorities and they perceive the state as ‘alien’, the ‘estrangement’ from the state turns into a profound sense of emotional detachment. The individual feels a ‘stranger’ and thus can easily develop a strong sense of community with those members of the national minority determined to oppose the homogenizing processes initiated by the state. In opposition to the majority nationalism instilled by the state emerges a novel emancipatory nationalism defending the right of national minorities to decide upon their political future. This nationalism has as its main task the rejection of the power of the ‘alien state’ through the political emancipation of citizens.

On ‘Emancipatory Nationalism’

Democracy implies popular sovereignty, and national self-determination may be regarded as its ultimate consequence (Guibernau, 2013). Where nation and state are coextensive, the political bond between the state and its citizens is perceived as the offspring of the multi-dimensional relation emerging from the idea of being a nation, that is, a cultural community sharing a common consciousness of forming a group with a distinctive name (The Greeks, the Flemish, the Catalans), a joint history, culture, attachment to a demarcated territory and the will to decide upon its political future.

The combination of all these attributes results in the emergence of a distinct national identity (Smith, 1991, p. 19, 2013, p. 7) that emphasizes the specific features of the citizens of a particular nation when compared with those of others. In this process nationalism uses pre-existing elements of the culture of the nation, but it does not just revive traditions, it also invents and transforms them (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 83). Where the state is coextensive with the nation, nationalism does not always display its colours. Rather, it permeates the day-to-day life of the nation-state (Billig, 1995) and only appears at the forefront in specific situations in which its integrity is in danger or where there is a need to defend some interests. The appeal to nationalist arguments is also useful when a politician tries to justify his or her policies.

Let us now turn to those Western liberal democracies in which nation and state are not coextensive with each other and where strong democratic nationalist movements have appeared in the second half of the twentieth century, for example Catalonia, Scotland and Flanders (Guibernau, 2007).

Although I am aware of varying degrees of support base on each case, contrasting wealth and economic indicators, as well as a distinct historical background and political culture, it is my argument that these examples signal the advent of what I define as 'emancipatory nationalism'. This is a democratic type of nationalism emerging in nations included within larger states who do not identify with them, do not feel represented by the state of which they are a part and do not feel politically and culturally recognized as nations by the state containing them.

Emancipatory nationalism stands as a step forward in the deepening of democracy by accepting the principle of consent. It defends the nation's right to decide upon its political future by democratic means and it includes the right to secession. It signals a key transition in the life of the nation evolving from adolescence to adulthood; this is illustrated by the nation's willingness to act and be recognized as a 'demos' able to decide upon its own political future.

This type of nationalism opens up a novel phase in the emancipation of peoples anchored in the ideas inspiring the French and the American revolutions of 1789 and 1786. Most recently, their claims are rooted in the Woodrow Wilson 'Fourteen Points Speech' of 8 January 1918, which included the right of peoples to self-determination. 'Emancipatory nationalism' abides by the rule of law, respects human rights and is committed to obtaining legitimacy by the people's consent. It is instrumental in voicing dissatisfaction with the status quo and challenges it. At present emancipatory nationalism emerges within the democratic framework created by the European Union, as Catalonia, Scotland and Flanders do not contemplate outright independence outside the EU.

States react in different ways to the demands of their national minorities and their reactions generally depend upon the political culture and history of each particular country. For instance, the British government's willingness to recognize Scotland as a nation and its readiness to allow a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 stand in sharp contrast to the Spanish position to forbid a referendum on Catalan independence.

Probably the greatest challenge faced by pro-secession Catalan and Scottish intellectuals and political leaders is the need to turn secessionism into a mass movement with the aim of legitimizing its cause (Hroch, 1985). It is also crucial to obtain international visibility, recognition and support regarding the legitimacy of its objectives. The official view is that 'national minority issues' are a 'state's internal affair', unless there are concerns regarding the violation of human rights, or geopolitical reasons that compel some

powerful nations or political institutions to recognize a ‘resistance movement’ as the true representative of a people. The White House response to a petition to support the people of Catalonia in their effort to decide their own future illustrates this point.¹ A petition to the Obama administration was created on 24 November 2012; it raised 33,070 signatures. This is the official White House response to the people of Catalonia, by Caitlin Hayden:

Thank you for your petition regarding the people of Catalonia. The United States recognizes the unique culture and traditions of the Catalan region, but considers the status of Catalonia to be an internal Spanish matter. We are confident that the Government and the people of Spain will resolve this issue in accordance with their laws and Constitution. (Caitlin Hayden, Deputy NSS Spokesperson and Assistant Press Secretary, January 2013)

PART 2

The Rise of Modern Catalan Nationalism

The industrialization of Catalonia in the nineteenth century was accompanied by major social changes along patterns similar to those that were taking place in other industrializing Western European countries and resulted in the creation of a sharp contrast between Catalonia and the rest of the Peninsula, with the exception of the Basque Country. This originated a very peculiar scenario in which the most economically developed part of a country, Catalonia, found itself politically subject to an anachronistic and backwards state, Castile, which held political power. The roots of such a state of affairs are located in the Spanish War of Succession; Catalonia supported the Austrian dynasty against the Bourbon claimant Philip V. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) confirmed Philip V as king of Spain and the Catalans found themselves on the side of the defeated candidate. After a massive Franco-Spanish attack that followed a siege of 14 months, Barcelona surrendered on 11 September 1714. Philip V ordered the dissolution of Catalan political institutions and set up a regime of occupation. Catalan was forbidden and Castilian (Spanish) was proclaimed as the official language; although the majority of the population could not understand it.

By the end of the nineteenth century, in Catalonia the influence of Romanticism favoured the *Renaixença*, a movement for national and cultural renaissance, and soon prompted demands for Catalan autonomy, first in the form of regionalism and later in calls for a federal state. Catalan nationalism did not emerge as a unified phenomenon. Rather, diverse political ideologies and cultural influences gave rise to different types of nationalism, from the conservative nationalism of Balmaçs, to the federalism of Pi i Margall, the Catholic nationalism of Torres i Bages, or the Catalan Marxism of Andreu Nin, among many others.²

Catalonia enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy under the administrative government of the *Mancomunitat* (1913–1923), suppressed in 1923 after the *coup d'état* of Miguel Primo de Rivera, and the *Generalitat* (1931–1938), abolished by General Francisco Franco's decree of 5 April 1938. After Franco's dictatorship, Catalonia would recover its autonomous government, *Generalitat*, in 1977, and sanctioned a new Statute of Autonomy in 1979. The president of the Catalan government in exile, Josep Tarradellas, returned

from France (1977). Jordi Pujol, leader of the Convergence and Union coalition (*Convergència i Unió* (CiU)) became the first president of the Catalan parliament in the first democratic election after Francoism (1980). Once in power, the CiU promoted a nation-building process focused upon the re-establishment of Catalan institutions, the promotion of the Catalan language—on the brink of disappearing after the political and cultural repression exerted by the dictatorship—and the construction of a novel Catalan identity.

From Francoism to Democracy

The transition to democracy can be regarded as an attempt by the Francoist political class to adjust its institutions to the requirements of modern society. In the 1970s, a growing dislocation between the social and the political sphere turned into a source of great concern for a regime forced to confront the numerous problems affecting Spanish society. Francoism, in spite of various attempts to adapt itself to a changing domestic and international environment, remained ill-suited to ruling a country experiencing continuous and deep transformations of far-reaching consequences, a country which had evolved from a rural into an industrial society, whose wealthier and more industrialized areas were Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Probably the most challenging legacy of Francoism was the need for a democratic response to the demands of the historical nationalities, which had endured years of repression topped by repeated attempts at their annihilation. It was necessary to overcome the reservations of conservative centralist politicians and some influential sectors of the Army committed to the defence of a united and homogeneous image of Spain. From this perspective, Spain is the result of a process of incorporation imposed by Castile on the periphery. For instance, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz wrote, ‘Castile built Spain and Spain broke Castile up’, and Ramón Menéndez Pidal considered the periphery (that is, what was opposed to the central state) to be ‘dispersive and the product of decadence’ (Tusell, 1999, p. 67). As Javier Tusell points out, these approaches can be found at the origin of the intellectual tradition of Spanish liberalism and contrast with a plural vision of Spanish reality and culture (Tusell, 1999, pp. 67–68).

In what follows I focus upon the political instruments that have shaped the relationship between Catalonia and Spain during the transition to democracy; these are: the 1978 Constitution, the creation of the Autonomous Communities System and the 1979 Statute of Autonomy.

The 1978 Constitution

The 1978 Constitution resulted from the consensus reached by the main political parties emerging from the first democratic election after the Civil War. The need to obtain the support of both Francoist reformists and anti-Francoist groups provoked continuous arguments and generated very tense situations while drafting the Constitution. Such discrepancies were reflected in the lack of precision and coherence evident in some parts of the constitutional text. It should be noted that, for the first time, Spain had a Constitution that was not the outcome of the opposition of a single political party to the others and which, in spite of some limitations and defects, offered a political model that ‘was not exclusive or divisive, but integrative’ (Solé Tura, 1985, p. 84). The radically conservative and centralist character of the brand of Spanish nationalism promoted by the Franco

regime was questioned by the 1978 Constitution, which not only aspired to transform Spain into a democratic state, but also recognized the existence of nationalities and regions within its territory.

The preamble to the Constitution proclaims the desire of the Spanish nation to ‘Protect all Spaniards and the peoples of Spain on exercising their human rights, their cultures and traditions, languages and institutions’ (Spanish Constitution, Preamble). Article 2, probably the most controversial, reveals the tension between defending the unity of Spain and the social pressure for the historical nationalities of Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country to be recognized: ‘The Constitution is based upon the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible *patria* of all Spaniards, and recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions that make it up and solidarity between all of them’ (Spanish Constitution, Article 2). Even more important, though, is the outright rejection of the centralist model imposed by Francoism embodied in this Article, which at the same time endeavours to reconcile the two ideas of the Spanish nation at stake during the Civil War (Guibernau, 2004). Article 2 declares that ‘unity’ has to be preserved, although it could be argued that ‘unity’ is somehow questioned by the recognition of ‘nationalities and regions’ at the heart of Spain. As Colomer states, this involves the recognition of ‘differentiated group consciousnesses’ formed historically (Colomer i Calsina, 1984, p. 351). According to Solé Tura, it is very controversial and legally ambiguous to emphasize the unity of a ‘nation’ while recognizing the existence of ‘nationalities’ within it (Solé Tura, 1985, p. 101). In this context, the reference to the ‘Spanish nation’ as the ‘common *patria*’ of all Spaniards seems implicitly compatible with the existence of other ‘small *patrias*’ such as Catalonia and the Basque Country.

The Autonomous Communities System

The makers of the Constitution opted for a model based upon symmetric devolution, what has been called ‘coffee for everyone’ (*café para todos*), and instead of directly responding to the nationalist claims of Catalonia and the Basque Country as nations, they decided to implement a system that would allow for the creation of 17 autonomous communities, some historically and culturally distinct—Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia—others artificially created where no sense of a separate identity had ever existed: La Rioja and Madrid, among others. In spite of current criticism and increasing pressure to modify the Autonomous Communities System, it deserves a positive evaluation as an instrument that permitted a peaceful accommodation of regional nationalism during the Spanish transition to democracy.

Although Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, which during the Second Republic had held plebiscites in favour of their own statutes of autonomy, and which in 1978 were enjoying recently restored provisional autonomous regimes, immediately gained ‘full autonomy’, other communities had to undergo a five-year period of ‘restricted autonomy’ before doing so (Article 143 versus Article 151 of the Constitution). Once full autonomy has been achieved, however, the Constitution makes no distinction between the different communities; rather, it places nationalities with a strong distinctive identity embedded in a common culture, language and past on the same level as artificially created ‘communities’, lacking any previous sense of identity (Articles 143 and 144).

According to Enric Fossas, the Constitution limits itself to establishing principles and procedures leading to a territorial reorganization of power, which could result in different political models. In his opinion, the so-called ‘autonomous model’ is a ‘pre-constitutional’ model, because the ‘provisional’ regimes of autonomy granted to various ‘communities’ prior to the Constitution determined its own drafting and its subsequent development. It is also ‘sub-constitutional’, because the Constitution did not create the Autonomous Communities System; it did not create the autonomous communities, nor did it define their territories, determine their organization, or set up their powers.

The Magna Carta restricts itself to determining ‘procedures’ in which the key figures are local representatives, who have to declare their desire for autonomy, and central state institutions, in particular the parliament, through the development of the so-called ‘Constitutional block’ (including statutes of autonomy and laws delimiting their devolved powers), and the Spanish Constitutional Court, as the supreme interpreter of the constitutional text through its jurisprudence.

Fossas stresses the singular nature of the 1978 Constitution, according to which the construction of the Autonomous Communities System is ruled by the so-called ‘*principio dispositivo*’. This establishes that the territorial restructuring of the country must not be directed from the centre, but stem from the will of the various territories and their representatives, to which the Constitution offers several routes to political autonomy (Fossas, 1999, pp. 282–283). It should be stressed that the Autonomous Communities System has evolved from an initial ‘differentiating’ interpretation, which granted a special regime to Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia (Transitional Provision Two, in relation to Article 152 of the Constitution), unlike that of the rest of the autonomous communities, towards a ‘homogenizing’ interpretation—resulting from the first Autonomous Agreements (1981) and the second Autonomous Agreements (1992)—the objective of which was to reduce the scope of the *principio dispositivo* (Fossas, 1999, p. 288).

Originally the Autonomous Communities System endeavoured to respond to the nationalist demands of the Basque Country and Catalonia, which had been severely repressed and threatened with cultural extinction during Francoism. Both communities believed that they were entitled to self-determination, and that they had the power to press for a political solution to their claims. However, what some saw as a fair demand, others regarded as a threat to the unity of the ‘Spanish nation’ conceived as a unitary state. Large conservative sections of the Army and the civil service, as well as former Francoists, were hostile to the recognition of nationalities and of regions within Spain. Even today there is no agreement concerning the meaning of the term ‘nationality’.

The Constitution laid the foundations for a new territorial organization of the Spanish state, divided into 17 autonomous communities. The relations between some autonomous communities and the central government have had their high and low points since 1978. The Constitution sought to reconcile the territorial integrity of the state with a considerable degree of cultural and political autonomy for the nationalities and regions included in it. This inevitably led to the rise of some tensions and problems between two entities, the central state and the historical nationalities, seeking the same objective, that is, the creation and promotion of the nation, but a nation filled with a different content in each case. The Spanish state endeavoured to consolidate the Spanish nation—by means of cultural and political homogenization—in order to obtain legitimacy and to avoid having to reduce its relations with the citizens to a simple political form of interaction defined by the concept of citizenship.

From a position of Spanish nationalism, J. Ramón Parada argues: ‘preaching the differential aspect of [peripheral] nationalisms seems to be a political propaganda operation’, and defends the theory that, to maintain the unity of Spain, ‘an agreement between the Spanish-wide political parties [this excludes regional parties] is necessary and should be complemented with the impetus and guarantee of the Crown’ (Parada, 1996, p. 294). Along the same lines and from supposedly progressive positions, Roberto L. Blanco Valdés describes the nationalist arguments as ‘constitutionally unsustainable’ and politically unacceptable’. He rejects calls for Catalonia and the Basque Country’s status as ‘nations’ and considers peripheral nationalisms to be a threat that could lead to the disintegration of the state. At the same time he speaks in favour of a ‘re-establishment of the prestige of the state project and of the acceptance of the Spanish historical and cultural community’, from which a new agreement among state-wide political parties should emerge (Blanco Valdés, 1999, p. 295).

Asymmetric Devolution and Federalism

For over 20 years after ratifying the 1978 Constitution, the key debate on the Autonomous Communities System revolved around whether it could develop into an asymmetrical model; however, this possibility encountered both the opposition of the main political parties in the Spanish parliament and the hostility of other AACC defending equality for all. The argument backing asymmetry was based upon the assumption that the *de facto* asymmetry implicit in the plurinational composition of the state could lead eventually to a *de jure* asymmetry (Fossas & Requejo, 1999, p. 288). According to Fossas, the open nature of the constitutional provisions and the validity of the ‘*principio dispositivo*’ have enabled the autonomous model to combine autonomy and asymmetry with some flexibility, in an attempt to reconcile the decentralization of power with the organization of a plurinational state. This *de jure* asymmetry present in the Autonomous Communities System is above all clear in the different level of powers devolved to the autonomous communities, in their internal organization, in their funding system and in the regulation of regional official languages, but not in other aspects, such as their representation in the Senate, constitutional reform and the composition of the Constitutional Court, which does not have a federal structure (Fossas & Requejo, 1999, p. 286).

Thus, in Fossas’s view, the limitations of the autonomous model on reflecting the plurinational nature of Spain do not emerge from the Constitution but from its subsequent development, which has involved:

- (1) Eliminating the constitutional recognition of the plurinational nature of Spain, something that has diluted the initial distinction between ‘nationalities and regions’, as a mechanism designed to recognize the specific nature of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia within the Autonomous Communities System.
- (2) Granting Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia a considerably lower level of autonomy than that which could have been obtained on applying a more generous reading of the Constitution. This has generated constant demands from the autonomous governments of Catalonia and the Basque Country, led by nationalist parties. Such demands have encouraged those of other autonomous communities, and this has forced the central government to extend to all communities the same powers that it had initially granted only to the historical nationalities.

- (3) Reducing the asymmetrical potential contained in the '*principio dispositivo*'—frowned upon by state parties—has generated dissatisfaction among nationalist parties demanding a special status for the nationalities they represent.
- (4) The lack of instruments facilitating the integration and participation of the historical nationalities in central state institutions (Fossas, 1999, p. 292).

In Catalonia, debates about asymmetry were contrasted with the federalist stance adopted by the Catalan Socialists Workers' Party (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC)) federated with the Socialists Workers' Party (PSOE). For instance, in Luís Moreno's view, 'the deep and widespread process of decentralization can be regarded as one of progressive federalization in line with the asymmetrical nature of Spain's composition' (Moreno, 2001, p. 154). They proposed a federal deployment of the Constitution, permitting the current transformation of the AACC. For them, the federalization of the state would contribute to the construction of a 'real Spain of nationalities in opposition to both a uniform Spain and a Spain of Cantonalism' (PSC-PSOE V Congress, 11–13 December 1987, point 1, p. 41). However, as socialist leader Raimon Obiols recognizes, within Spanish socialism there is a tension between federalist and centralist tendencies, and the latter is greatly influenced by the Jacobin and statist ethics impregnating the culture of the French left (*La Rosa*, Barcelona, November 1991). At the Spanish level, support for federalism has been either weak or non-existent.

The 1979 Statute of Autonomy

The preamble to the Statute is very clear on this point: 'This Statute is the expression of the *collective identity* of Catalonia' (*my italics*). Further on, the text refers to the 'collective life' and to the 'collective freedom' of Catalonia. The Statute offers a particular image of Catalonia and its relationship with the rest of Spain. It defines its institutions as well as its relations with the state 'within a framework of free solidarity with the other nationalities and regions of Spain. This solidarity is the guarantee of the genuine unity of all the peoples of Spain' (1979 Statute, p. 7). Consequently, and in accordance with the Statute, Catalans have their collective identity recognized within the state, but they are also constrained by the framework set up by the Statute and the Constitution. They cannot aspire to independence unless the Constitution is changed. For this reason, and at least theoretically, it is assumed that Catalan nationalism should 'reject' the ideal of 'one nation, one state'. However, such an ideal is currently being defended by some Catalan political forces, which stand for outright independence to be achieved by peaceful and democratic means.

Spain as a Majoritarian Democracy

Lijphart (1984, p. 3) establishes a distinction between majoritarian and consensus models of democracy. He argues that majoritarian democracy is particularly suited to homogeneous societies, whereas 'consensus democracy' is more suitable for plural societies. The overarching principle that distinguishes majoritarian and consensual forms of democracy is the answer to the question: 'Who rules?' The answer given by majoritarian systems is 'the majority of the people', whereas in consensual systems it is 'as many people as possible' (Lijphart, 1984, p. 4).

McGarry & O'Leary (2009, p. 6) argue that:

Pluri-national federations make it easier for groups to secede should they want to do so. Federalism provides a territorially defined and concentrated nationality or ethnicity with political and bureaucratic resources that it can use to launch a bid for independence ... Pluri-national federations implicitly suggest the principle that the accommodated groups represent 'peoples' who might then be entitled to rights of self-determination under international law.

The Preliminary Section of the Statute defines Catalonia as a nationality that 'in order to accede to self-government, constitutes itself as a Self-Governing Community in accordance with the Constitution and with this Statute' (Article 1.1) (it should be underlined that the sovereignty of Catalonia is implied in this declaration) and the *Generalitat* as 'the institution around which the self-government of Catalonia is politically organized' (Article 1.2). The powers of the *Generalitat* 'emanate from the Constitution, this Statute and the people' (Article 1.3). These provisions make clear that the Constitution defines the extent and number of devolved powers. 'The people' (the Catalans) stand in third place. This point stresses the existence of a single sovereign demos in Spanish democracy, constituted by all Spaniards, including the Catalans, which on ratifying the Constitution made the autonomy of Catalonia possible. This interpretation considers the Catalan people to be a 'subgroup' of the demos formed by all the citizens of Spain.

We could infer, in accordance with this reasoning present in the Constitution and in the Statute, that access to political power (*kratos*) by the Catalan people is determined by a demos of which the Catalan people form a part, and not by the specific free will of the Catalans constituted as a 'sovereign demos' (Requejo, 2000, pp. 108–114). This implies that even if the majority of Catalans were to defend a specific option, because they are a minority within Spain, they have no possibility of moving forward unless specifically allowed by the Spanish state. For instance, the Catalan's will to hold a referendum on independence is faced with gridlock unless the Spanish state permits it. In Spain, national minorities have a voice—access to Congress and the Senate—however, they have no veto power, and only acquire distinctive relevance whenever one of the main political parties is short of a majority and needs their votes to form a government. Then, suddenly, minorities become crucial, as was the case in 1993 and 2000.

Spain can be cited as an example of majoritarian democracy in so far as decisions are taken according to the principle of majority rule, identified as the institutional context within which the populist-patriotic drift can degenerate (Conversi, 2012, p. 794).

According to the Constitution, Spain is a single 'demos' formed by 'all Spaniards'; the Catalans are regarded as a part of that single 'demos' and this automatically deems any attempts to hold a referendum on self-determination in Catalonia illegal unless allowed by the state. In turn, Article 2 of the Constitution argues that 'the Constitution is based upon the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, common and indivisible patria of all Spaniards', and Article 8 states that 'the Army's mission is to guarantee the sovereignty and independence of Spain, to defend its territorial integrity and the constitutional set up'.

From Devolution to Secession

Modern Catalan nationalism emerged in the 1960s as a progressive social movement defending democracy and freedom against Franco's dictatorship, demanding a Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia and amnesty for the regime's political prisoners. Franco's

death in 1975 allowed a transition to democracy led by members of his own regime. At the time Catalonia played a key role in the democratization of Spain by strongly supporting EU membership, providing economic and industrial leadership and being committed to solidarity towards Spain. Vitally, Catalan nationalism was instrumental in overcoming the 1993 crisis and strongly supported Spain to fulfil the conditions to join the euro. However, it was felt by many that Catalan loyalty and support did not pay off as Spain reinforced centralism.

By and large, the Catalan nationalist movement had never been overwhelmingly secessionist. Since its inception in the late nineteenth century, secession from Spain had not been the objective of its leaders; Jordi Pujol, president of Catalonia 1980–2003 and leader of the CiU, did defend devolution, although he has changed his position since leaving office and currently supports Catalan independence. Overall, different alternative options—ranging from federation to political autonomy—have embodied the main Catalan nationalist projects.

Radical political change was initiated after the 16 November 2003 Catalan election when the new PSC (PSC-PSOE)-ERC-ICV³ government, under the leadership of the socialist Pasqual Maragall, ended 23 years of CiU's government at the *Generalitat*.⁴

Once in power, Maragall was to propound the drafting of a new Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia; an updated much more ambitious statute than that of 1979. However, this turned out to be a much more complicated business than initially expected. Conflict and differences emerged among Catalan political forces, which finally managed to agree on a draft to be submitted to the Spanish parliament, where Mr Rodriguez-Zapatero—at the time, socialist Prime Minister of Spain—had the majority.

A socialist prime minister in Spain and a socialist president of Catalonia might have been expected to smooth out the sanctioning of the new Statute. But this was not the case; on the contrary, profound discrepancies emerged between Maragall and some sectors of the PSOE, as well as between him and some sectors of the Catalan Socialists of whom he was the leader. The process culminating in the referendum that voted 'yes' to the 2006 Statute was long and acrimonious, and Catalan society, its political forces and Maragall himself were to pay for it.

Instability generated by differences among members of the three-party coalition ruling Catalonia since December 2003 forced early elections. Maragall was prevented from standing as leader by the pro-PSOE sector in his own party, and his successor, José Montilla, became president of the *Generalitat* after repeating the coalition with ERC and ICV. Again, the CiU won the election and obtained 12 more seats in the Catalan parliament than the second party (the PSC); however, they were outnumbered by the three-party coalition formed by the PSC, the ERC and ICV.

PART 3

Why is Secessionism Currently Growing in Catalonia?

I identify three main factors in explaining the recent rise of secessionism in Catalan society. First, the José María Aznar government's (2000–2004) lack of response to demands for greater autonomy for Catalonia, at a time when secession was not even mentioned. Second, the legal challenging of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy and its subsequent trimming after it had already been sanctioned by the Catalan parliament, and both the

Spanish Congress and the Senate as well as by the Catalan people, in a referendum. Third, increasing awareness of the impact of accumulating an annual deficit of 8% of Catalonia's GDP due to the financial arrangements established by the Spanish state. The latter economic argument has acquired higher relevance as Catalan society endures a harsh economic crisis. In January 2013, Catalonia had reached a record 23.9% unemployment and Spain had reached 26.2% (or 5,965,400 million unemployed).⁵ Let us analyse these factors in greater detail because the emotions they have triggered are closely connected with the rise of secessionism in Catalonia.

Lack of Response to Demands for Greater Autonomy

Soon after the 2000 landslide victory of José M. Aznar's conservative Popular Party (PP, Partido Popular), sympathy and understanding towards Catalan demands for further autonomy and recognition were replaced by hostility embedded in a neo-centralist, conservative and neo-liberal political discourse. At the time, the Popular Party became dismissive of claims for greater autonomy for the historical nationalities (Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country). In 2005 a boycott against Catalan products—in particular 'cava' (sparkling wine)—developed in Spain.

In Catalonia, growing dissatisfaction with the Aznar government guaranteed strong support for J. L. Rodríguez Zapatero, the leader of the PSOE, who became Prime Minister in the 2004 election. Most people received the PSOE's electoral victory with joy and regarded Rodríguez Zapatero, a supporter of the so-called 'plural Spain', as sympathetic to Catalan political aspirations; an assumption that proved wrong after he was unable, or unwilling, to stand by his promise to support the new Statute of Autonomy to emerge from the Catalan parliament.

The Spanish Constitutional Court Suspended Parts of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia after it had Already been Sanctioned

Initially, the Catalan parliament ratified the Statute of Autonomy—90% of MPs voted in favour. The Statute was subsequently revised and modified by the Spanish parliament in Madrid to comply fully with the Constitution, and it was finally sanctioned in a referendum (18 June 2006) by the Catalan people.

Immediately after being sanctioned, the 2006 Statute of Autonomy was challenged in the Spanish Constitutional Court of Justice—arguing that some of its content did not comply with the Spanish Constitution. Legal proceedings challenging 51.5% of the Statute's text were taken by the Popular Party. In addition, the Spanish Ombudsman—a member of the PSOE—decided to challenge 48% of the text, and the government of the autonomous communities of Murcia, La Rioja, Aragon, Valencia and the Balearic Islands (two of them ruled by the PSOE and three by the PP) also initiated legal proceedings against the Statute (Homs, 2008, p. 205). This generated a sense of outrage among Catalans, who could not understand how the newly approved Statute—after following all the procedures and modifications as requested by Spanish political institutions and the Constitution—could still be challenged.

After four years, the Spanish Constitutional Court finally issued its verdict 28 June 2010.

The Spanish Constitutional Court sentence against the 2006 Statute of Autonomy. The main points to be removed from the 2006 Statute of Autonomy and declared non-constitutional according the Spanish High Court of Justice were the following.

- (1) The Spanish Constitution acknowledges the existence of a single Spanish nation within Spain. The sentence accepts the use of the term ‘nation’ applied to Catalonia as legitimate *only* if this is interpreted as void of juridical value. The term ought to be strictly employed in an ideological, historical or cultural context. The sentence emphasizes quite a few times the ‘indissoluble unity of Spain’ as stated in the Constitution.
- (2) The expression ‘national symbols’ employed in the 2006 Statute of Autonomy is to be interpreted as ‘symbols of a nationality’, so that there is no contradiction with the symbols of the Spanish nation, the only ones to be properly considered as ‘national’.
- (3) It is deemed unconstitutional to confer a preferential status to the Catalan language within the Catalan Public Administration. Catalan is confirmed in its status as a preferential language in the Catalan education system. Students have the duty and the right to be fully competent—to speak and write—in Catalan as well as Castilian (Spanish) after completing their compulsory education.
- (4) The duty to be competent in Catalan in Catalonia is not considered as having the same meaning/importance/legal status as the duty to be competent in Castilian (Spanish) included in the Spanish Constitution.
- (5) The verdict rejects the attempt of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy to protect matters already devolved to the Catalan autonomous government from the constant legislation of the Spanish state concerning these areas. The state appeals to the need to guarantee uniformity within the state to justify its measures.
- (6) The 2006 Statute sought to eliminate the Catalan economic deficit generated by the endemic imbalance between Catalan contributions to Spanish coffers and state funding received by Catalonia. To avoid that, the Statute demanded that Catalonia’s contribution to the so-called ‘solidarity fund’ should be made conditional on a similar fiscal effort being made by other AACC. With this measure, Catalonia was trying to avoid that an AACC in need of a high percentage of funds from the ‘solidarity fund’ could afford to lower its taxes as an electoral strategy, while the other AACC had to pay for its needs. This has been deemed non-constitutional.
- (7) According to the 2006 Statute the Catalan government could set up its own taxes at local level. This has been deemed non-constitutional.
- (8) The 2006 Statute established that the state’s investment in Catalonia should be on a level with the percentage of Catalan GDP in relation to the overall Spanish GDP. The Spanish Constitutional Court accepts this, if and only if, ‘it does not entail an “economic privilege” for Catalonia and remains without ‘binding effect for the State’.⁶
- (9) The following articles of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy were also deemed unconstitutional: Articles setting up a Catalan Council of Justice; establishing the exclusivity of the Catalan Ombudsman concerning the Catalan Administration; and the status and role of the president of the Catalan High Court of Justice, as the representative of the judicial power in Catalonia nominated by the King.⁷

Catalonia's Fiscal Deficit with the Central Administration

With 23.9% unemployment (rising to 40% among young people) in Catalonia, the deepening of the economic crisis is hitting hard. Resentment against the Spanish government's economic policies and dissatisfaction with politics prevail: in Catalan society, those who are 'dissatisfied with democracy' rose to 49% in March 2012. Catalonia, a traditionally prosperous region, sees its wealth and status downgraded as it loses competitiveness and lacks resources and saving for infrastructure while accumulating an annual deficit of 8% of GDP due to the financial arrangements imposed by the Spanish state. In this context, support for Catalan fiscal autonomy (*Pacte Fiscal*) is rising fast and secession, for the first time in Catalan history, appears as a legitimate option.

According to the latest available data Catalonia's average contribution to the Spanish Central Administration and Social Security corresponds to 19.40% of the total. By contrast, Catalonia receives 14.03%. After contributing to Spain's Solidarity Fund, Catalonia is worse off than those autonomous communities subsidized by the Fund and finds itself below average in per capita spending.⁸

The 2012 Budget presented by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy did not contemplate the state paying back its pending debts to Catalonia. According to the Statute these include €759 million for 2008 and €219 million for 2009. In addition, the state's investment in infrastructure in Catalonia has been reduced by 45%, and now stands at 11% of the total, far from the 18.6% that would be an equal share for Catalonia.⁹

Table 1 measures the impact of the public sector on the macroeconomic situation of the territory. This is particularly relevant at times of crisis and unemployment. Catalonia suffers a continuous contraction shock due to the fiscal territorial deficit.

Table 2 measures the impact of the public sector on the well-being of the residents of a territory. This type of flow is less robust than the monetary flow because it relies upon more suppositions and approximations.

Table 1. Fiscal deficit of Catalonia with the Central Administration 2006–2009: monetary flow

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Million euro	– 14,493	– 15,913	– 17,200	– 16,409
% Catalan GDP	– 7.9%	– 8.1%	– 8.5%	– 8.4%

Source: Generalitat de Catalunya, 12 March 2012, based on data released by the Spanish government: Las Balanzas fiscales de las CC.AA. españolas con las AA. Públicas centrales 2005. Ministerio de economía y hacienda, Madrid, 15 July 2008, p. 19. Balanzas Fiscales 2006–2009, which is the latest available.

Table 2. Fiscal deficit of Catalonia with the Central Administration 2006–2009: benefits flow

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Million euro	– 10,320	– 11,136	– 11,860	– 11,261
% Catalan GDP	– 5.6%	– 5.6%	– 5.9%	– 5.8%

Source: Generalitat de Catalunya, 12 March 2012 based on data released by the Spanish government: Las Balanzas fiscales de las CC.AA. españolas con las AA. Públicas centrales 2005. Ministerio de economía y hacienda, Madrid, 15 July 2008, p. 19. Balanzas Fiscales 2006–2009, which is the latest available.

PART 4**Civil Society Takes Over**

In 2009, Catalonia had already witnessed civil society organizing a series of non-binding symbolic referendums on whether the country should become independent. This was unprecedented, in particular since Catalan nationalism had never been a primarily secessionist movement. On 13 December 2009, with the support of 15,000 volunteers, 166 Catalan towns and cities held referendums on Catalonia's independence. The referendums were not legally binding, but they contained an important symbolic meaning. Participation amounted to 27%, and 94.71% voted in favour of Catalonia's independence. To date, the Spanish state forbids the holding of a legally binding or consultative referendum in Catalonia.

On 10 July 2010, over one million people demonstrated in Barcelona against the Spanish Constitutional Court decision to suppress 14 articles of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy and modified a further 30, creating an unprecedented situation. The civil society association *Omnium Cultural*, led by its president, Muriel Casals, organized the demonstration guided by the motto 'We are a nation. We decide'. In November 2010, fresh elections to the Catalan government resulted in a change of government, and Artur Mas, leader of the nationalist party *CiU*, became president of Catalonia.

From Devolution to Secession

Consider the question 'if tomorrow there was a referendum to decide on Catalan independence, how would you vote?' In 2011, 42.9% of Catalans said that they would vote in favour of independence. In December 2012 support for independence rose to 57% (CEO, 2012). In Catalonia, the enthusiasm for democracy associated with the initial phase of the transition to democracy has gone. Lack of trust in politicians and institutional politics, accompanied by central bad economic management, corruption scandals and open hostility to Catalan demands, have alienated a rising number of citizens.

According to the latest available data (CEO, March 2012), 4.4% of Catalans consider that they have too much autonomy, 23.9% are satisfied with the current level and 65.7% feel frustrated by insufficient autonomy. The percentage of Catalans considering that they have too much autonomy has dropped from 4.4% (March 2012) to 3.9% (November 2012). Those satisfied with the current level have dropped from 23.9% (March 2012) to 18.6% (November 2012) and, while 65.7% felt frustrated by insufficient autonomy in March 2012, their number rose to 71.6% in November 2012.

Table 3. Relation between Catalonia and Spain. Do you think that Catalonia has achieved ...?

Catalonia's degree of autonomy	March 2012%	November 2012%
Too much	4.4	3.9
A sufficient degree	23.9	18.6
An insufficient degree	65.7	71.6
Don't know	4.9	4.5
No answer	1.0	1.3

Source: CEO (2012).

Catalonia’s Degree of Autonomy

When questioned about what should be the type of relationship between Catalonia and Spain, we are able to identify a descent in the number of people maintaining that ‘Catalonia should be a Spanish region’ from 5.2% in March 2012 to 4% in November 2012. In the same period the percentage of people considering that Catalonia should be a Spanish Autonomous Community has dropped from 27.8 to 19.1% while the percentage saying that Catalonia should be a state within a federal Spain has dropped from 30.8 to 25.5%. In November 2012, 44.3% of Catalans stood in favour of Catalonia becoming an independent state, a rise of 15.3% (considering that support for an independent Catalonia obtained 29% in March 2012).

The Catalans’ View

Table 4 illustrates the Catalans’ view regarding what should be the relation between Catalonia and Spain. In contrast, Table 5 presents the Spaniards’ view of how the Spanish state should be organized.

Table 4. In your view, what should be the relationship between Catalonia and Spain? Catalonia should be ...

Political status of Catalonia should be	March 2012%	November 2012%
A Spanish region	5.2	4.0
A Spanish Autonomous Community	27.8	19.1
A state within a federal Spain	30.8	25.5
An independent state	29.00	44.3
Don’t know	5.4	4.9
No answer	0.9	2.2

Source: CEO (2012).

The Spaniards’ View

There is a sharp contrast between the political status Catalans would like for Catalonia—according to data provided by CEO offering data for Catalonia only—and the views of Spaniards, including a sample of Catalans, regarding the organization of the Spanish state and the status of its current AACC.

Table 5. With which of the following alternatives regarding the organization of the Spanish state do you agree most?

The Spanish state should be	December 2012%
A unitary state with central government and NO AACC	24.6
State with fewer devolved powers to the AACC	12.3
Current model of state with AACC	32.5
State with greater devolved powers to AACC	11.9
State acknowledging the right of the AACC to become independent states	9.4

Source: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), Madrid, December 2012. Question 22.

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Table 6. If a referendum on Catalan independence were to be held tomorrow, how would you vote?

Independence, 'I would vote'	June 2011 %	November 2011 %	March 2012 %	June 2012 %	November 2012 %
In favour	42.9	45.4	44.6	51.1	57
I would vote against	28.2	24.7	24.7	21.1	20.5
I would abstain	23.3	23.8	24.2	21.1	14.3
Other	0.5	0.6	1.0	1.0	0.6
Don't know	4.4	4.6	4.6	4.7	6.2
No answer	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.1	1.5

Source: CEO. I have elaborated this table by collating data from CEO.

Figure 1 illustrates the Catalan view regarding what should be the political status of Catalonia. According to the latest report by the CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Madrid, December 2012), 24.6% of Spaniards stand in favour of Spain as a unitary state with a central government and without autonomous communities, 12.3% favour a centralized state with fewer devolved powers for the AACC and 32.5% support the current model of state with AACC. While 44.3% of Catalans support Catalonia becoming an independent state and 25.5% consider that Catalonia should be a state within a federal Spain, only 11.9% of Spaniards approve of granting more powers to the AACC; and a mere 9.4% back the right of the AACC to become independent states. The differing views of Catalans and Spaniards reveal a clear opposition between the two.

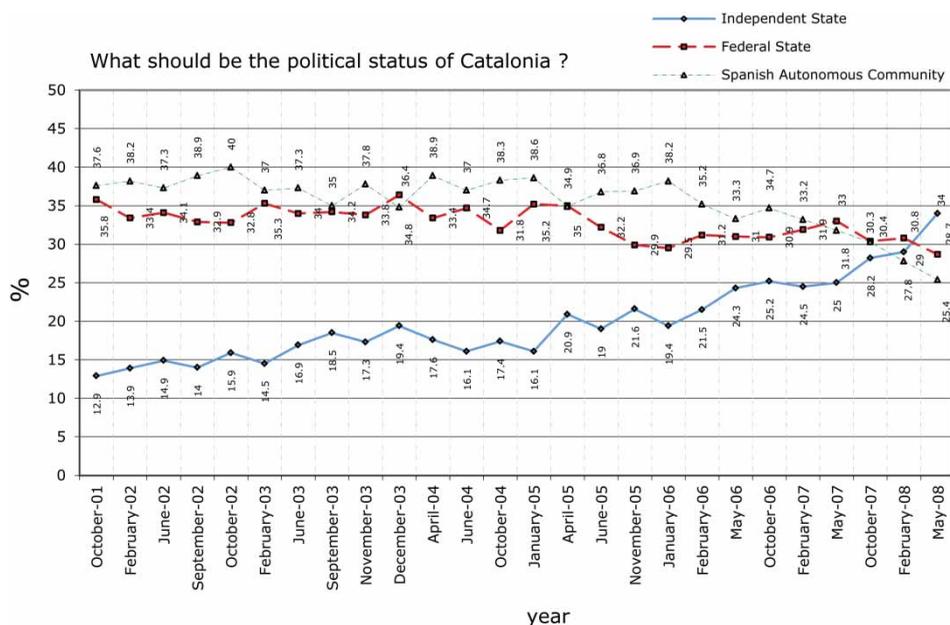


Figure 1. What should be the political status of Catalonia?

Source: I have elaborated this figure by collating data from various sources including CEO, CIS and ICPS.

Table 6 illustrates the rise of secessionism from 42.9% in June 2011 to 57% in November 2012. This information is confirmed by the chart showing the evolution of Catalan support for three main options: status quo, that is, Catalonia should remain an AACC within Spain; Catalonia should be a federal state; and Catalonia should be an independent state.

Independence

After considering the rise of secessionism in Catalonia by collecting and analysing data from various sources, we are able to identify the main reasons invoked both by those in favour and those against independence. As shown in Table 8, we discover that the main argument invoked by those supporting independence is the desire for fiscal autonomy (34.8%) followed by the wish for greater prosperity and freedom (21.4%). This has no ethnic connotations and refers strictly to the plea to redress Catalonia’s economic situation defined by an endemic and exceptionally high annual fiscal deficit. Although at first glance this could be defined as a ‘rational argument’, I am not sure whether this is free from emotional connotations as fiscal autonomy for Catalonia is felt passionately by many citizens who declare their conviction of being unfairly exploited, taken advantage of and marginalized within Spain.

At present all taxes are collected in Catalonia and sent to the Central Administration in Madrid to be distributed. As a consequence of lower returns, Catalonia accumulates an annual deficit of 8.5% of its GDP. Growing discontent about this has been rising as the secessionist movement gains strength. This is reflected in the response to the question in Table 7.

In turn, as indicated in Table 9, among those against Catalan independence, 45.6% invoke their willingness ‘to preserve Spanish unity’ as their main argument. This is a

Table 7. Are you totally in favour, mostly in favour, mostly against, or totally against the Catalan Administration collecting and deciding upon the distribution of all taxes paid by all Catalan citizens and businesses?

Totally in favour	58.7%
Mostly in favour	20.6%
Mostly against	7.8%

Source: CEO (2012).

Table 8. What are the main reasons for you to stand in favour of Catalan independence?

Top reasons <i>in favour</i> of independence	March 2012 %
Desire and ability to have fiscal autonomy	34.8
Catalonia would improve (greater prosperity, freedom, etc.)	21.4
The rest of Spain does not understand Catalonia	13.8
Greater autonomy	13.7
Identity (I feel Catalan)	12.8
Recognition of Catalonia as a nation	9.6

Source: CEO (2012).

Table 9. What are the main reasons for you to stand against Catalan independence?

Top reasons against independence	March 2012 %
To preserve Spanish unity	45.6
It would not be positive for Catalonia	13.6
Identity reasons	12.5
In favour of globalization, against territorial divisions	6.4
Independence is an extreme position	6.2
I don't have a strong position on this	1.1

statement supporting the idea of Spain as a single nation of which Catalonia is a part, regardless of whether or not the Catalans entertain aspirations for greater devolution or secession. The main motivation against independence is that it would break the integrity of the Spanish nation.

Identity

Much has been written about the role of identity in determining individual political options and stance for or against devolution and secession. As indicated in Table 10, the most recent data on these issues reveal that, in Catalonia, the percentage of people who feel 'only Spanish' has dropped from 3.4% (March 2012) to 2% (November 2012). In turn, the number of those feeling 'more Spanish than Catalan' has risen by 0.1% (from 2.4 to 2.5%). A significant change has occurred regarding those feeling 'as Spanish as Catalan' dropping from 42.4% (March 2012) to 35% (November 2012). Meanwhile, the percentage of those feeling 'more Catalan than Spanish' has risen by a mere 0.5% (from 28.2 to 28.7%). A more significant shift has taken place among those who feel 'Only Catalan', rising from 21.1% (March 2012) to 29.6% (November 2012). This confirms that, although the majority of Catalans feel 'as Spanish as Catalan' (35%)—and the other questions about dual identity offer small variations—there is a significant rise in the percentage of those who feel 'only Catalan', shifting from 21.1% (March 2012) to 29.6% (November 2012).

The Road to Secession?

The rise of secessionism identified in the various tables and figures analysed in this paper materialized in the Barcelona 11 September 2012 peaceful demonstration of

Table 10. Which of the following sentences better reflects your identity?

Identity	March 2012 %	November 2012 %
Only Spanish	3.4	2.0
More Spanish than Catalan	2.4	2.5
As Spanish as Catalan	42.4	35
More Catalan than Spanish	28.2	28.7
Only Catalan	21.1	29.6
Don't know	0.6	0.7
No answer	1.9	1.6

Source: CEO (2012).

1.5 million people in favour of independence as an event that has shaped the political agenda. The president of Catalonia, Artur Mas, called a snap election on 25 November 2012 and, if successful, he promised to hold a referendum on self-determination. The pro-sovereignty parties won the Catalan election; they obtained 71 seats out of a total of 135 in the Catalan parliament. However, the result was lower than initially predicted and weakened the leadership of Artur Mas.¹⁰ Figure 2 provides election results for both 2010 and 2012.

It looks as if many traditional CiU supporters decided to vote ERC instead, under the idea that they would be much more efficient in leading the process towards Catalan independence. An additional factor points at the high toll paid by CiU as a result of being in government at a time when harsh economic measures have been applied to the Catalans.

In spite of having won the election, CiU obtained a bad result and Artur Mas did not receive the clear majority he sought to achieve. Three key factors contributed to alter the 2012 election forecast by generating a complex situation in the Catalan parliament.

First, participation reached a record 69.56%—over 10 points above that registered in the last election (58.78%).

Second, the Spanish government was much more proactive than in previous regional elections and launched an effective campaign highlighting the perils of secession and taking a strong stance against the political parties defending the sovereignty option. Third, Article 2 of the Constitution was repeatedly invoked to remind people that the Spanish Constitution prevents any direct vote on the issue. In turn, Article 2 of the Constitution argues that ‘the Constitution is based upon the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, common and indivisible *patria* of all Spaniards’, and Article 8 states that the Army’s mission is to guarantee the sovereignty and independence of Spain.

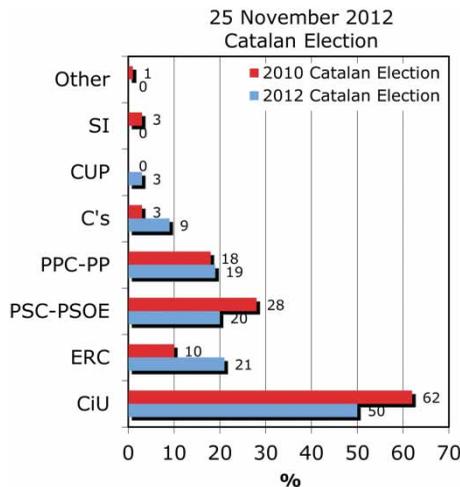


Figure 2. Number of seats in the Catalan parliament

Note: SI: Solidarity-Independence Party; CUP: Candidatura of Popular Unity Party; C’s: Citizens; PPC-PP: Popular Party; PSC-PSOE: Socialist Party; ERC: Catalan Republican Left; CiU: Convergence and Union Party.

Source: Own elaboration based on *Generalitat de Catalunya*, official data.

To strengthen his position and obtain a reasonable majority, Mas signed an agreement with the leader of the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), Oriol Junqueras, who also supports a referendum on Catalan independence. However, Junqueras is not willing to enter into a coalition with the CiU. He knows that an eventual participation in a coalition government would make the ERC co-responsible of the still further cuts that are in the pipeline. This has the potential to generate further instability, and the governability of Catalonia could become a major issue, unless the current situation is sorted out satisfactorily. If Catalonia becomes impossible to manage, two possible outcomes might be contemplated: new elections to the Catalan parliament and even the decision of Spain to take over and ‘suspend’ Catalan autonomy; these are extremely serious measures.

It is also paramount to acknowledge that, although Catalonia has a majority in favour of sovereignty—57.73%—a significant sector of the electorate, 35%, stands against it. Their position has the support of the main Spanish political parties: the conservative PP and the PSOE, which have the majority in the Spanish Congress. Whereas, as it stands, the strength of the pro-sovereignty sector would be tested by their ability to offer a viable way forward able to integrate different sensibilities within the already divided pro-sovereignty movement. However, the seriousness of the current economic, social and political situation calls for responsibility, a furthering of democracy and dialogue as to the way forward.

In Barcelona, the civil society movement in favour of Catalan independence constituted itself into the Catalan National Assembly at a meeting in April 2011. Its main objective is: the re-establishment of Catalonia’s political independence by creating a Catalan state within the European Union.¹¹ Since then, the ANC (Catalan National Assembly) has been proactive in promoting secessionism by organizing a range of peaceful, democratic initiatives across Catalonia.

In line with the objectives set up by the new legislature, on 23 January 2013 the Catalan parliament approved a declaration proclaiming the Catalan people a ‘sovereign political and legal entity’. The text calls for a referendum in which Catalans have their say on independence.

Conclusion

This article acknowledges the emergence of ‘emancipatory nationalism’ as a novel type of democratic nationalism rising in Western liberal democratic states where nation and state are not coextensive with each other; for example, in Catalonia, Scotland and Flanders. It signals the coming of age of nations included within larger states invoking the right to decide upon their political future. At present, ‘emancipatory nationalism’ includes the quest for independence within the European Union as one of its novel and distinctive features.

In Catalonia public political distrust of and resentment towards politicians and the political system is combined with unhappiness regarding long-lasting limitations to demands for greater political autonomy. They also lament Catalonia’s fiscal deficit as well as the lack of recognition of Catalonia as a nation within Spain. Cultural and identity issues feature prominently among their demands.

I locate the origin of the shift from devolution to secession in Catalonia as the outcome of two parallel processes. First, the consolidation of democracy has allowed people to express their political aspirations without fear—this is new to a society that endured

almost 40 years of dictatorship—while regarding them as legitimate. New generations brought up within democratic Spain are convinced of the legitimacy of their claims, among them, the right to decide upon their political future by means of a referendum, as will be the case in other European democracies, for example in Scotland. To a significant extent this accounts for the Catalans' eagerness to engage in grass-roots mobilization to express their discontent with the status quo.

Second, the Spanish state has been above all opposed to recognizing Catalonia as a nation and to demands for greater devolution, while defending a centralist view of the state shared by both conservatives and socialists. When interviewing in Catalonia, people with different political allegiances would time and again cite the lack of response to demands for greater autonomy for Catalonia (never secession, at the time). They would also point at the suspension of parts of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy, after it had already been adjusted to comply fully with the Constitution and sanctioned in a referendum (18 June 2006), as an unprecedented move without parallel in modern Europe, and are eager to highlight Catalonia's fiscal deficit with the Central Administration in Madrid. These are arguments with a potent emotional content that has contributed to widen the gap between Catalonia and the Spanish state by fostering a growing sense of alienation among significant sectors of Catalan people, which has materialized in the rise of a secessionist civil movement.

The so-called 'Edinburgh Agreement' between the British Prime Minister and First Minister of Scotland to allow a binding referendum on Scottish independence stands in sharp contrast to the Spanish government's outright opposition to allowing a similar vote in Catalonia. This highlights the distance between different conceptions of democracy coexisting within the European Union and which are rooted in the diverse political cultures of nations with different historical backgrounds.

Currently, the European project is faced by the democratic peaceful demands of small nations, such as Catalonia, who are willing to be recognized as nations within the EU. This could trigger a fundamental reconfiguration of power within the EU. It responds to a desire for greater democracy at a time when the traditional nation-state is being challenged by transnational and global governance as well as by the legitimate right of peoples to decide upon their own political destiny. In this environment, civil society emerges as 'the most viable domain for mounting challenges and constructing alternatives that consolidate participatory democratic processes' (Voss & Williams, 2011, p. 369) such as the Catalan democratic secessionist movement studied here. This new milieu provides an opportunity to redress the EU democratic deficit. It also opens up the possibility to lighten the bureaucratic burden of EU institutions. Above all, it stands as a unique occasion to enhance a shared sense of European identity by means of greater political and economic integration.

Notes

1. <http://petitions.whitehouse.gov/response/our-response-people-catalonia>
2. See Bilbeny (1988), and also Colomer (1984).
3. PSC: Socialist Party of Catalonia, federated with the PSOE; PSOE: Spanish Socialist Workers' Party; ERC: Catalan Republican Left; ICV: Greens.
4. At the election, the PSC (PSC-PSOE)-CpC obtained 42 seats, corresponding to 31.17% of the vote. Against all predictions, the CiU, with its new leader Artur Mas, managed to obtain 30.93% of the vote, which corresponded to 46 seats. As well as the PSC, it had also lost 10 seats when compared with 1999. The key to political change in Catalonia was then in the hands of the ERC, which obtained

- a record 23 seats, corresponding to 16.47% of the vote. In the 1999 election, it had obtained 8.7% of the vote, corresponding to 12 seats. The ICV achieved a significant recovery, obtaining nine seats (it had five previously), and the PP obtained 15 seats, three more than in 1999.
5. *La Vanguardia*, 24 January 2013, *Catalan News Agency*, accessed 24 January 2013.
 6. *El País*, Madrid, 9 July 2010, 'La Constitución no conoce otra nación que la Española', <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Constitucion>, accessed 27 September 2010.
 7. *El País*, Madrid, 28 June 2010, Los artículos considerados inconstitucionales', <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Constitucion>, accessed 27 September 2010.
 8. *El País*, 11 May 2008. See also, Las Balanzas fiscales de las CC.AA. españolas con las AA. Públicas centrales 2005, Ministerio de economía y hacienda, Madrid, 15 July 2008, p. 19.
 9. *La Vanguardia*, 4 April 2012, <http://lavanguardia.com/politica>, accessed 4 April 2012.
 10. CiU won the Catalan election by obtaining 50 seats, corresponding to 30.68% of the vote, that is, 1.112.341 million votes. However, CiU lost 12 seats. On this election, the biggest winner was the Catalan Republican Left (ERC)—a party in favour of independence founded in 1931. ERC progressed from 10 to 21 seats in the Catalan parliament, thus obtaining 13.68% of the vote, equivalent to 496,292 votes.
 11. Declaration of the National Conference for the Constitution of a Catalan State, Barcelona, 30 April 2011.

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