

What Leads to Secessionism? Explaining the Rise of Independence Claims in Catalonia, 2010–2012

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Increasing calls for regional independence are being made in many European countries. If you look at the map of secessionist movements and official political parties in Europe that favour some form of independence, the continent would look like a “patchwork”.

The political mobilization for secession is the case which can be tracked in Catalonia between 2010 and 2012. In April 2010 we find 21,5% of independence support towards other forms of accommodation whereas in October 2012 the 46,4% independence support observed. So, secessionism has more than doubled during the observed period, while it remained more or less stable in 2013 (just 4 points change), with a decline in 2014. (figure 1) [2]

The aim of this paper is to define the reasons for increasing independence sentiments. With the purpose to address the research question, the study focuses on the concept of “secessionism”. J. R. Wood conceptualized secessionism as a political program based on the demand for a formal withdrawal of a bounded territory from an internationally recognized state with the aim of creating a new state on that territory, which is expected to gain formal recognition by other states (Wood, 1981: 110)[9]. Milanovich & Sambonis (2011) summarizes at least 14 plausible explanations of the rising demands for sovereignty, including political discrimination, ethnic concentration of minorities, economic inequalities, territorial disparities, etc.[7] Nevertheless, the main gap in the literature refers to the little attention of sudden increases of secessionism. This gap had been addressed by using frame analysis to identify the main causal explanations for fluctuating sentiments because, as with any feeling, secessionism is subject to constructive changes. Feelings can vary, change or be framed artificially. Framing literature provides an explanation of how particular narratives are constructed and how they can affect political mobilization with particular demands. [8] Based on frame, rational choice as well as political mobilization literature, several hypotheses has been generated: [3][4][6]

- the increase of pro-independence "problem solving" frequencies of frames leads to increasing demands for secession. (H1)
- pro-secessionist sentiments in the society are more likely to raise when the expectations of the independent economy are higher than the current form of accommodation (H2)
- increasing independence claims are driven by civil society (H3) or by political elites (H4)

The research employs both qualitative (coding, process tracing) and quantitative (multinomial logistic regression) methods to deal with measurement of independence sentiments. H1 was tested by calculating quantitatively the frequencies of each frame related to Spanish-Catalan relations and qualitatively, unpacking different types of frames and alignment process in the discourse about it. H2 was measured with the help of multinomial logistic regression (MLR) based on survey data from sociological institutions of Catalonia. H3 and H4 were analysed with the empirical evidence derived from the most trustful source of information for Catalans which is La Vanguardia. [1]

The study period demonstrates the very powerful effect of frames on public opinions and

attitudes. Regarding H2, where the rational choice predicts the rise of secessionism as a function of an independent economy, the results showed relatively strong support and correlation. The estimations of the better economy were a statistically significant predictor as to the likelihood of voting for independence within the study period.

The interplay between frames showed high support also for H1. Resonance theory states that the frame has to be "problem solving" in order to intensify mobilization. [5] The main "problem solving" frames had undergone the frame alignment process from frame bringing in 2010 to frame transformation in 2012. Only after transformation can we track the rapid growth of secessionism. The "diagnosis" frames outline the problem and serve to justify voting for independence due to the frequency of "economic frames" and MLR models. However, the resolution to the poor Spanish-Catalan relations lies in the problem-solving frames which resonate the public. It is tracked from the rising of such frames simultaneously with the growing independence.

Nevertheless, the results find it difficult to support both H3 and H4. Neither "civil society" agent was actively presented in public discourse nor the clear "message from the top in favour of independence - acceptance response from civil society to political leaders" mechanism has been observed.

In summary, the Catalan case provides new insights not only in the explanation of the secessionism and the better understanding of the events which occurred at the beginning of the decade but also a good test for the mechanism of framing process. Frames are widely used in micromobilization and intensification of social movements. The importance of "motivational" or problem-solving as well as "diagnosis" frames should not be underestimated. "Diagnosis" frames serve as reasonable predictors and can define the primary reasons for secessionism meanwhile "problem-solving" play the role of catalysts of political mobilization. Secessionism, like many other values, is principally constructed in people's mind rather than stated as prescriptive features.

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Иллюстрации

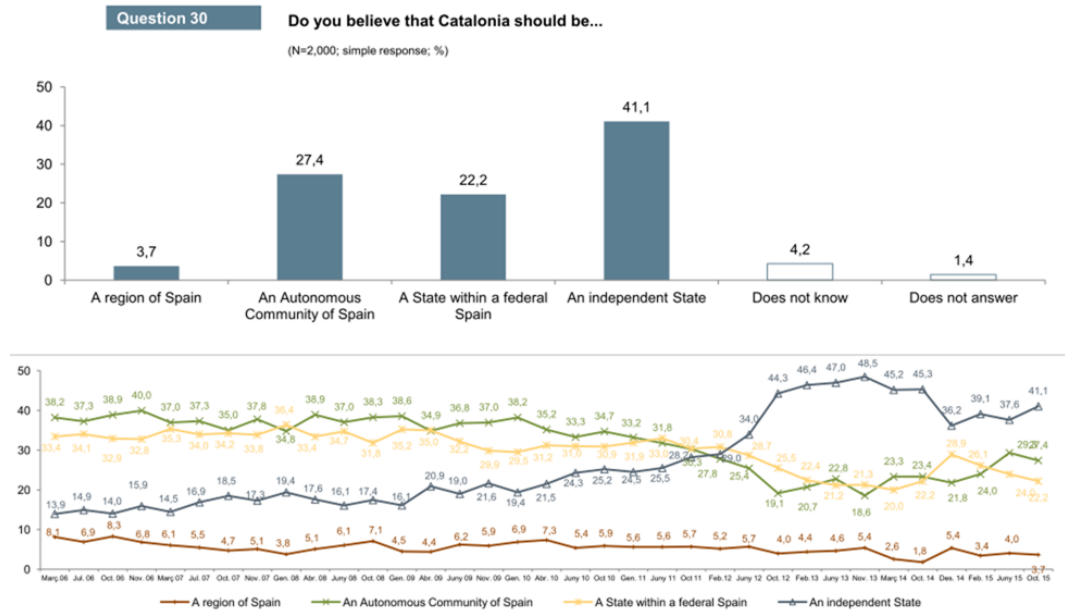


Рис. 1. CEO, 2015