

Secessionist Strategy and Tactical Variation in the Pursuit of Independence

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Abstract

How do secessionist movements formulate strategy and choose tactics? Secessionism takes place on a strategic playing field that shapes tactical behavior, driving some movements to choose armed rebellion while others prefer nonviolent civil resistance or electoral competition. Secessionist movements attempt to compel and make normative appeals in different combinations depending on local conditions such as regime type, the strength of the state, and the degree to which the region is already *de facto* independent. These efforts are aimed at not only the home state, but also the international community that can apply pressure on the home state to negotiate with the secessionists. I identify six kinds of movements—democratized, indigenous legal, combative/strong state, combative/weak state, decolonial, and *de facto*—and I outline the perils and possibilities inherent in each kind. I then construct a theoretical framework and test the implications using original data on secessionist tactics between 1946 and 2011.

Keywords: secession, recognition, civil resistance, civil war, strategy

Introduction

What is the strategy of secession and how do tactics vary by the kind of secessionist movement? A review of contemporary secessionism shows a variety of tactical settings. Some movements, such as Scotland and Catalonia, are pursuing their ends using combinations of electoral capture and civil demonstrations. In contrast, regions that lack the same geographic and political connectivity with their legal home state—regions such as Northern Cyprus and Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh)—are relegated to a *de facto* (but unrecognized) status where defense, deterrence, and diplomacy are critical. Other regions from West Papua to Bougainville to Western Sahara are faced with the hard choice between civil resistance and the use of violence. As the recent events in both Iraqi Kurdistan and Catalonia demonstrate, the pursuit of independence can be enormously disruptive and potentially violent. We

need a theoretical framework to explain the purpose behind this behavior.

There is considerable value in understanding the strategy and tactics of secession. This is a topic where international order has very real effects on the behavior of local actors. The rules, norms, and practices regarding sovereign recognition shape the strategies of secessionist movements, driving some to choose armed rebellion while others prefer nonviolent civil resistance and/or electoral competition. There were more than fifty secessionist movements as of 2011 (Griffiths 2016), and these groups are surprisingly networked and aware of the various ways that sovereignty can be obtained. They observe and learn from one another. Several scholars have conjectured that the practices surrounding recognition may create unfair outcomes and perverse incentives, convincing some that violence is the surest way to gain

independence (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Fazal and Griffiths 2014; Fazal 2018). Indeed, Walter (2009, 3) has argued that secessionism is the “chief source of violence in the world today.”¹ If the strategy of secession promotes violence, it would be useful to understand not only why, but also when and where, so that proper policies can be established to save lives.

I argue that secessionism takes places on a strategic playing field consisting of formal and informal rules and practices for becoming a sovereign state. In strategic terms, secessionist movements need to convince their home state and/or the international community to recognize them. To do so, they engage in what I call compellence and normative appeal. Compellence is the use of assets to compel the home state and/or international community to make a change. It is direct action designed to increase the costs of not complying with secessionist demands. Normative appeal includes a different set of tactics that are designed to showcase the grievances and demands of the aspiring nation and either change preferences on the issue or bring into the game previously uninvolved parties.

Although all movements use compellence and normative appeal in pursuit of independence, they do so in different combinations that are determined by local factors. These factors coalesce around six identifiable kinds of movements: democratized, indigenous legal, combative/strong state, combative/weak state, decolonial, and de facto. The conditions in each setting favor different tactical options. In terms of compellence, these include electoral capture, nonviolent civil resistance, and the use of violence. In terms of normative argumentation, these include the appeal to earned sovereignty, decolonization, the right to choose, inherent sovereignty, and human rights. In sum, all secessionist movements maneuver on the same strategic playing field, but their tactics vary according to local conditions. The successful movements will be those who can compel and convince their home state and/or the international community to make a change.

This article fills an important gap in the literature. The theoretical framework clarifies the behavior of diverse secessionist movements and accurately predicts the tactics they adopt. It brings together three litera-

tures on secession that are usually treated separately: the work on de facto states (Pegg 1998; Berg 2009; Caspersen 2012; Florea 2014), the research on secessionist political parties in advanced democracies (Keating 2004; Swenden 2006; Van Houten 2007; Beland and Lecours 2010), and the study of secessionist conflict (Toft 2002; Walter, 2006, 2009; Cunningham 2014; Bakke 2015; Seymour, Bakke, and Cunningham 2016; Butt 2017; Krause 2017). Whereas much of the generalist secession literature centers on whether the movement becomes independent (Osterud 1997; Pavkovic and Radan 2007; Roeder 2007; Sorens 2012; Coggins 2014; Griffiths 2015, 2016; Cunningham and Sawyer 2017; Krause 2017), I focus on what they do to achieve independence.² This is a neglected area of research, and to my knowledge I am the first to develop a comprehensive theory for how secessionist movements formulate strategy and choose tactics in pursuit of independence. My theory uses insights from the work on social movements (Tarrow 2011; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Schock 2013), civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2007; Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2009; Toft 2010; Kalyvas and Balcells 2010; Mampilly 2011; Stanton 2013; Staniland 2014; Balcells 2017), and the burgeoning literature on rebel governance and diplomacy (Bob 2005; Mampilly 2011; Jo 2015; Huang 2016; Coggins 2017; Stewart 2018) and integrates them with the work in international law and state recognition to build a theoretical framework (Ratner 1996; Bartos 1997; Osterud 1997; Grant 1999; Crawford 2006; Fabry 2010; Sterio 2013; Coggins 2014; Griffiths 2017).³ I show how the international recognition regime creates a strategic playing field for secessionists, and I test the implications from my theory using original data on the tactics used by 136 secessionist movements between 1946 and 2011.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. I first outline the strategic playing field and explain the strategy of secession. I detail the logics of compellence and normative appeal, identify six tactical kinds, and develop a theoretical model predicting the tactics that each kind will pursue. I finish by testing my theory in a quantitative and content analysis using original data on secessionist tactics.⁴ Along the way I support my analysis and theoretical development with knowledge

1 Fearon and Laitin (2003) estimate that 52 percent of the civil wars between 1945 and 1999 involved secessionism. Similarly, Sorens (2012, 3) claims that “since the 1980s, at least half of all ongoing civil wars in any given year have been secessionist.” Griffiths (2015) calculates that there has been an average of fifteen secessionist conflicts since 1945.

2 In a recent contribution, Roeder (2018) examines how breakaway leaders propagate a successful nation-state project.

3 See the 2018 Special Issue in *Ethnopolitics* on international engagement by de facto states.

4 All data used in the analysis are available in the online appendix.

drawn from interviews with representatives of international organizations and a number of secessionist movements.⁵

The Strategic Playing Field

A secessionist movement is a “self-identified nation inside a sovereign state that seeks to separate and form a new [recognized] sovereign state” (Griffiths 2016, 205; Radan 2008, 18). The set of secessionist movements is quite varied. It includes unrecognized but de facto states such as Somaliland and Transnistria, secessionist regions such as Scotland and Assam, as well as dependencies and other forms of semiautonomy such as Bougainville and the Faroe Islands. Despite their varied setting, these actors are united by the fact that they all seek to become a sovereign state.

There are interesting club-like aspects to the relationship between sovereign states and those who aspire to become sovereign states (Griffiths 2017). First, there is a clear value in being recognized as a sovereign state. It includes the right to conduct your own affairs and the possession of a legal identity with which you can enjoy a large set of benefits, including admittance to major international organizations, access to financial aid, and the ability to use international post and conduct commerce with foreign banks (Caspersen 2012, 42).⁶ These benefits are known to secessionist groups and are regularly cited during personal interviews as a core motive in their cause.⁷ Second, states have proliferated since the mid-twentieth century, and the existing states have named several reasons for controlling that proliferation. These include the dilution of vote share and political influence of existing members in key organizations such as the United Nations (UN) (Crawford 2006), concerns over the viability and instability of new states (Halperin, Scheffer,

and Small 1992; Crawford 2006, 184–85), and, perhaps most importantly, the issue of uncontrolled fragmentation (Toft 2002; Walter 2006, 2009; Griffiths 2015). Just as aspiring nations have incentive to join the club, existing members have incentive to control admission.

Third, the existing member states determine which nations are admitted into the club (Fabry 2010; Sterio 2013; Coggins 2014). In formal terms, the defining feature of becoming a sovereign state is obtaining a full seat in the UN General Assembly (UNGA). More than just a marker of legitimacy, this provides the state with a seat in the global parliament and a corresponding legal identity that is useful for a range of economic and diplomatic purposes. The UN membership process requires that the Security Council must approve applications before they are submitted to the General Assembly. Nine of the fifteen members (60 percent) have to vote in the affirmative without any “no” votes from the five permanent veto-holding members (the P5): France, Russia, China, United Kingdom, and the United States. The P5 are the true gatekeepers to the organization. An application that is approved by the Security Council is then subject to a vote in the General Assembly and has to secure a two-thirds majority. Once admitted applicants have declared that they will abide by the UN Charter, they can join the organization as a full member.

At first glance the admission process would appear relatively harmonious. Crawford (2006) records that only five applicant states met with any objection between 1963 and 2005.⁸ But this apparent consensus is misleading because applications are usually only brought before the Security Council when they are uncontroversial. Potential applicants are screened in two ways. First, representatives from the UN Secretariat and Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) will initially review applications to determine if the applicant counts as a state.⁹ That determination is made by reviewing the activities of the applicant (e.g., is it a member of international organizations) and by consulting other states for their view. In practice, the

5 In some cases, the interviewees requested to remain anonymous. Information is taken from a larger project in which I conduct interviews with more than one hundred individuals representing over a dozen secessionist movements.

6 Full sovereignty is not always preferred. Dependencies such as the Cook Islands have thus far chosen to maintain their connection to New Zealand.

7 For example, in an interview on April 1, 2011, with Rashid Nur, the Somaliland Representative to the United States, he told me that international sovereign recognition would alleviate a number of serious practical concerns, such as the inability to conduct financial transactions with foreign banks because the central bank of Somaliland is unrecognized.

8 The United Arab Emirates was approved in 1971 with only one dissent (South Yemen). Belize was approved in 1981 even though Guatemala dissented. Oman was approved in 1971 with opposition from South Yemen, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait was initially vetoed by the Soviet Union in 1961 and had to wait two years to gain admission. Likewise, Bangladesh was initially vetoed by China in 1972 and had to wait until 1974 for full admission (Crawford 2006, 180–81).

9 Author’s interview with UN Representatives on July 6, 2017.

applicants that are screened at this stage are usually considered too small and/or unviable.¹⁰ However, the second, and perhaps more important, form of screening takes place even earlier when potential applicants dialogue with key actors—to the extent that they can—to gauge how they would vote. A rejected application could be a blow for most aspiring nations, and it is for this reason that so many secessionist movements—from Abkhazia to Iraqi Kurdistan—have not yet applied.

These formal rules and screening practices all beg the question: Who counts? Put another way, what aspiring nations are eligible to become a state and how is that eligibility determined? The simple answer is that states decide; recognition rests in the hands of individual states. As Crawford (2006, 390) puts it, “secession is neither legal nor illegal in international law, but a legally neutral act, the consequences of which are regulated internationally.” However, individual state decisions are influenced by an evolving set of international legal norms, rules, and principles regarding sovereign recognition (Fabry 2010). In this constitutive process, substantial weight is given to the home state from which the secessionists aim to break away. The consent of the home state is the surest pathway to sovereign statehood. In the absence of that consent, secessionists need to compel and persuade other states to give their support.

Figure 1 provides an illustration of the strategic playing field, and the two approaches an independence movement can take when attempting to gain international recognition. The first is where the movement persuades the home state to give its consent by removing the home state veto (Osterud 1997; Griffiths 2016). The second is where the movement goes around the home state—an end run—and convinces key actors in the international community to take up their cause and either apply pressure on the home state or simply

recognize the independence movement.¹¹ For examples, South Sudan was able to remove the home state veto and get consent, partly with assistance from the international community; Bangladesh (East Pakistan) won international recognition in the absence (at least initially) of Pakistani consent. Most movements combine these approaches, but much depends on the disposition of the home state. Where it is reticent and unwilling to negotiate, the end run becomes more important.

I contend that secessionism can be modeled in strategic terms. The conditions for a theory of strategy include identifiable actors, an objective, rules of the game, knowledge of the game, and resources that can be directed toward achieving the objective (Schelling 1966, 3–20). The actors are secessionist movements and states, and the objective is to become a sovereign state. The rules of the game are formal and informal in nature, consisting of perceived pathways to independence that, as I detail below, give rise to instrumental behavior—“precepts, maxims, strategems, and tactics [that] are derived from experience and contribute to winning play.”¹²

Importantly, secessionist movements are typically quite knowledgeable about the strategic playing field, both because they learn through observation and because they are usually networked with one another.¹³ For example, the Catalan secessionists sent political strategists to Scotland in mid-2014 to gather tactical knowledge from the Scottish National Party about how to target their independence message to different segments of the

10 The UN does not release records of screened applicants. However, one example is the Principality of Snake Hill, a breakaway region in Australia that declared independence on September 3, 2003. Consisting of roughly two hundred people and 1.6 kilometres of territory, their story is chronicled on their website—<http://snakehillprincipality.blogspot.com.au/>—and in Siegel (2012). In a personal interview on October 18, 2013, with the Snake Hillian leaders, Princess Helena and Princess Paula, I was shown formal correspondence from the UN and told that their application for UN membership had been rejected.

11 Huang (2016, 124) finds that secessionist rebels, “for whom international recognition is essential for attaining independent statehood,” are more likely than other types of rebels to engage in international diplomacy. See Jo (2015) for similar findings. For related arguments about bringing the international community into local contests, see Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Bob (2005).

12 Jackson (1990, 34–35) refers to this behavior as the sovereignty game.

13 One fascinating aspect of the network of secessionist movements is its vertical differentiation. Whereas small, low-profile movements appear keen to network with all other movements, prominent groups such as Scotland limit their formal associations for diplomatic reasons. It is well-known that the Scottish National Party severed formal relations with the Catalan secessionists in the months prior to their independence referendum in September 2014. The reason was simple: a formal relationship with Catalonia might have created obstacles to their pursuit of UN and EU membership.

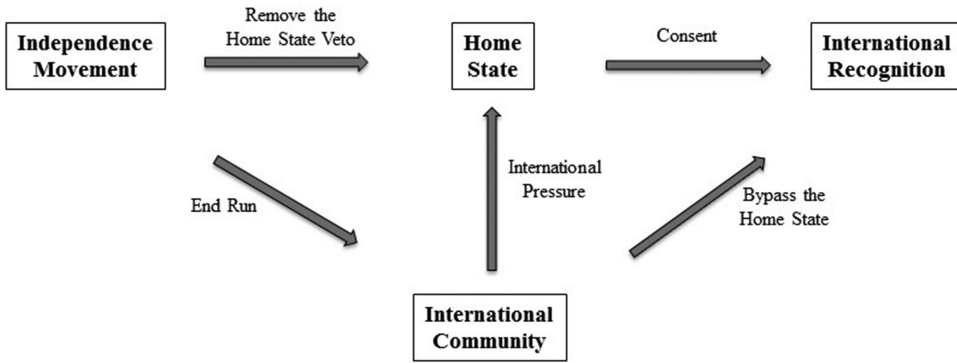


Figure 1. The strategy of secession

population.¹⁴ Moses Havini, the Bougainville Diplomat at Large during the 1990s, stated in a personal interview that during that time he befriended, and learned from, Xanana Gusmão, the East Timorese independence leader, as they pitched their respective causes to the international community.¹⁵ Bayan Sami Abdulrahman, the former Kurdish Regional Government Representative to the United Kingdom (and current Representative to the United States) stated that she used to hold weekly knowledge-sharing lunches in London with the representatives of Quebec, Flanders, and Catalonia.¹⁶ A similar relationship exists between independence movements in Melanesia such as the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of New Caledonia and the United Liberation Movement of West Papua (ULMWP). Finally, advice on how to obtain sovereign statehood can also be acquired through diaspora networks, in-house legal counsel, nongovernmental organizations, and consultancies such as Independent Diplomat.

A key component of a strategic theory of secession is a specification of how resources are used tactically to achieve the objective. Figure 1 depicted the strategic playing field and outlined two approaches. Both approaches utilize what I call compellence and normative appeal.¹⁷ Compellence is about forcing a target to do something that they would not otherwise do (Schelling 1966, 71–73;

Pape 2003; Stanton 2013). It depends on the credible promise that punishment will follow if the actor does not comply. Secessionist movements typically aim to compel the home state and/or international community to recognize them as an independent sovereign state. To bring about the desired change, the movement may engage in a set of compellence tactics ranging from the use of outright violence to electoral capture to nonviolent forms of civil resistance that put pressure on the target to comply. The use of suicide bombers by the Tamil Tigers were acts that aimed to influence Sri Lankan state policy. The partial capture of the Catalan Parliament was viewed as a means to force the Spanish state to negotiate. The self-immolation of Tibetan monks is partly a form of protest that is designed to put pressure on the Chinese state.

The second type of tactic used by secessionists is to make a normative appeal to the population of the home state and the international community. This type of tactic is analytically distinct from compellence. The difference is that normative appeal is aimed at preferences while compellence is aimed at costs. The appeal to norms is designed to win the hearts and minds of target populations, bring them into the game in some cases, and make them more amenable to the secessionist cause. As I discuss below, these appeals usually reference prominent normative arguments in international life. In contrast, compellence is more directly confrontational; it takes preferences as a given and increases or decreases the costs of choosing particular actions.

The Bougainvillean secessionist struggle from 1989 to 2001 provides a useful illustration of the power of normative appeal. Cut off from the outside world by a military blockade carried out by Papua New Guinea (PNG), Bougainville’s leadership relied on their Sydney-based representative, Moses Havini, and his Bougainville Freedom Movement, to bring their cause to a global

14 Author’s interview on December 4, 2015, with the Political Director of the Catalan Election on September 27, 2015.
 15 Author’s interview with Moses Havini on February 6, 2013.
 16 Author’s interview with Bayan Sami Abdulrahman on May 25, 2017.
 17 See Mampilly (2011, 74) for a related discussion about how rebels use strategy and ideology to achieve their ends.

audience. Havini stated in a personal interview that he struggled to get international attention, but that a breakthrough came when his team managed to smuggle several boxes of disposable cameras onto the island with the simple instructions that the insurgents photograph the atrocities.¹⁸ Only one camera was ever returned. However, it contained photos of dead bodies, some of them children, who were killed when the PNG army shelled a church. Havini delivered those photos to the Australian media and cites that moment as a crucial turning point in public opinion regarding the conflict and Australia's responsibility in the region. Eventually, Australia helped broker a peace agreement that brought increased autonomy to Bougainville and the promise of a future referendum on independence—that referendum is currently scheduled to be held in late 2019.

Compellence and normative appeal can be used in tandem and often complement one another. Bougainville's diplomatic wing operated at the same time as secessionist forces fought the PNG army. Military leaders such as Francis Ona and James Tanis attempted to coerce the PNG government into negotiations by increasing the costs of noncompliance.¹⁹ Havini's diplomatic efforts gradually changed the preferences of the international community about the Bougainville conflict. Normative arguments can ultimately have a coercive effect on the home state because increased pressure is brought to bear through diplomatic channels, boycotts, embargoes, etc. Indeed, such arguments can create reputational costs for the home state. Although the end result is the same—convincing the home state and/or international community to make a change—the logic is different insofar as it targets preferences, even if costs are subsequently incurred.

The appeal to norms encompasses a wide set of tactics. As the Bougainville example showed, the appeal to human rights can have a strong effect. Similarly, the bloody conflicts in Kosovo and Bangladesh were instrumental in raising international support that paved the way for independence. A different approach is to appeal to liberal democratic norms of legitimacy and argue for the right to choose. The Catalans have repeatedly demanded that the Spanish state give them a referendum on independence, as the UK has with Scotland. Interestingly, nearly all secessionist movements engage in forms of showmanship and paradiplomacy to portray themselves as viable and functional states (Bob 2005; Huang 2016;

Coggins 2017). This is most evident in the case of *de facto* states such as Somaliland and Nagorno Karabakh, who try to show that standards have been reached in the hope of one day achieving the status of independence. But numerous groups develop diplomatic wings, tap diaspora communities, and participate in international organization for stateless nations such as the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization) and CONIFA (Confederation of Independent Football Associations). It is clear from a visit to the government-funded Catalan National History Museum in Barcelona that this is a nation trying to establish its credentials as a once and future sovereign state.

Secessionist movements come in all shapes and sizes. At close range the realities of Scottish nationalism look rather different from Karen nationalism. But seen from a wide angle, all secessionist movements are playing on the same field. To get recognition as a sovereign state, they need to get their home state and/or the international community to make a change. To do so, they engage in compellence and normative appeal. Importantly, their tactical choices are calibrated and contextualized by local conditions. I now zoom in to examine this tactical variation.

Tactical Variation

Although secessionist movements are quite heterogeneous, there are six identifiable kinds of movements—what I might call tactical kinds. This set of kinds is broad in scope, and it encompasses three literatures that are usually treated separately: the work on *de facto* states (Pegg 1998; Berg 2009; Caspersen 2012; Florea 2014), secessionist political parties in advanced democracies (Keating 2004; Swenden 2006; Van Houten 2007; Beland and Lecours 2010), and secessionist conflict (Toft 2002; Walter, 2006, 2009; Kraus 2013/2014; Cunningham 2014; Bakke 2015; Seymour, Bakke, and Cunningham 2016; Butt 2017). These three research areas constitute a form of compartmentalization in the field because the relevant scholars are normally dialoguing within and not across group. The work on *de facto* states looks at how unrecognized but empirical states endure in the international system, and the work is typically conducted by IR scholars, sociologists, and geographers. The research on secessionist political parties merges with the study of electoral politics and federalism. The work on secessionist conflict blends with the civil war literature. Yet, many movements are discussed in more than one literature or move back and forth between them over time—the boundaries between them are hardly impermeable—and all of these movements are united by the fact that they are playing the same strategic game.

18 Author's interview with Moses Havini on February 6, 2013.

19 Author's interview with James Tanis on October 12, 2012.

Table 1. Tactical variation by kind of secessionist movement

<i>Tactical kind</i>		<i>Compellence</i>	<i>Normative appeal</i>	<i>Example</i>
High institutional	Democratized	Electoral capture	Freedom to choose	Catalonia
	Indigenous legal	Electoral capture	Inherent sovereignty	Murrawarri
Combative	Strong state	Nonviolent civil resistance	Human rights	West Papua
	Weak state	Violence	Human rights	Bougainville
	Decolonial <i>De facto</i>	Varied n/a	Decolonization Earned sovereignty (standards before status)	Western Sahara Northern Cyprus

The analysis of these six kinds is useful for predicting tactical variation based on local conditions such as regime type, the strength of the state, and the degree to which the region is already *de facto* independent. Importantly, I am not theorizing a typology in the sense that George and Bennett discuss, where the types are mutually exclusive (George and Bennett 2005). Rather, these six kinds represent clusters of characteristics, not unlike peaks on a topographical map, that can be observed through an analysis of all contemporary movements. But there is hybridity, and some movements demonstrate composite characteristics. Nevertheless, these kinds coalesce around specific conditions that generate predictable patterns of tactical behavior.

The sequence in which I introduce the six kinds of movements follows from their structural relationship with the home state. I begin with one of the most integrated kinds, the democratized movement (see Table 1). These take place in highly institutionalized/democratic polities and include prominent movements such as the Québécois and the Catalans. At the macrolevel they employ the same general strategy as the others: they take aim at the home state and use the end run. However, their tactics differ in accordance with the institutional environment. Their main tactic of compellence is electoral capture—that is, using the democratic institutions of the state to pursue independence. Their primary normative appeal is that an identifiable nation should be able to choose its political fate via a democratic process.²⁰ Although these efforts are largely aimed at getting the home state to give consent to independence, the end run approach is nevertheless part of the game. For example, the Catalan secessionist leadership has attempted to get external governments to apply pressure on Madrid to

negotiate.²¹ These movements typically become political parties (sometimes several competing parties) with deep intellectual, financial, and community support. Although these movements have much going for them and are usually the envy of other secessionists, the democratic process commits them to a struggle to win over the majority of the electorate. As the Scottish National Party has discovered, that is no easy task.

Indigenous legal movements are the next tactical kind. This set includes the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, the Lakotah, the Maori, and the Murrawarri Republic, among other less formalized movements. They represent a variation on the democratized movement insofar as they also maneuver in, and perhaps depend on, a highly institutionalized and democratic environment in which they can compete electorally. The key difference is that they can appeal to historical injustices regarding the fate of indigenous peoples in settler societies. To some degree all secessionist movements are networked, but the indigenous legal kind constitutes a subgroup using a shared vocabulary regarding inherent sovereignty. Since these nations were not included under the ambit of decolonization, their legal representatives, arguing that *terra nullius* was incorrectly applied, have typically challenged the legality of their forced inclusion in states such as the United States and Australia. Their sovereignty was never relinquished and is inherent (Buchanan 1998; Pavkovic and Radan 2007). As Fred Hooper, Chair of the Republic of Murrawarri, put it, “*terra nullius* was a fiction. [W]e

20 Known as choice theory (or primary rights theory), this argument has some resonance in democratic societies (Beran 1998; Pavkovic and Radan 2007).

21 Most of these efforts have been coordinated through Catalonia’s considerable diplomatic network, and they center on the democratic right to choose independence. However, coercion also plays a part. Albert Royo- Maríné, the Secretary General of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia, stated in a November 20, 2015, interview that his strategy was to create conflict with the Spanish state that would force other European states to get involved.

declared that we were always independent of Australia [in reference to the March 30, 2013, Murrawarri declaration of independence].”²²

The next two kinds are the combative movements. Together they account for at least half of the secessionist movements since 1945. They are located in weak or nondemocracies and are politically integrated with the larger state. This set includes the Uighur and the Karen, among others. Given their interconnectivity and potential for friction with the state and their weakly or noninstitutionalized settings, they are often the location of violence and suppression. I hypothesize that their chief normative argument will focus on the right to secession in the face of human rights abuses by the state. This is the remedial rights argument, and it has some support (and opposition) at the international level.²³

The difference between the two kinds is the strength of the home state.²⁴ There is a developing literature that argues persuasively for the strategic logic of nonviolent civil resistance, and a central theme in that literature is that these tactics can overcome the asymmetry that normally exists between social movements and national governments (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Tarrow 2011; Schock 2013; Macleod 2015). As one leader of the independence effort in West Papua said, “violence does not work for us because the Indonesian state is too strong; nonviolence is the answer.”²⁵ I posit that secessionist movements are more likely to choose violence when they face weaker states and approach parity with

them, as Bougainville did in the 1990s when it was able to fight the PNG forces to a “hurting stalemate” (Premdas 2004, 240). Secessionist movements will blur these lines, sometimes employing both tactics or alternating between them, but I hypothesize that the choice of tactics will correlate with the strength of the home state that opposes them.²⁶

The fifth tactical kind is what I call the decolonial movement. The defining feature of these movements is their ability to appeal to the norms surrounding decolonization. Relative to the other normative arguments discussed in this article, decolonization is usually a winning hand, one that is recognized by UN resolution.²⁷ Indeed, it was by utilizing this argument that many former colonies, from Angola to East Timor, were able to mount an end run on a reluctant home state. Some of the movements in this study, such as Western Sahara, are on the UN List of Non-Self-Governing Territories (the “Decolonization List”), and their independence is blocked by the home state. Others, such as West Papua, are currently excluded from the list for diplomatic reasons and the fact that there is some ambiguity when determining who counts for decolonization.²⁸ Importantly, the compellence tactics of these movements vary considerably because their settings vary. Somaliland is a de facto state movement; West Papua is a combative movement opposed by a strong state; and New Caledonia is currently pursuing independence through the institutions of the French state. They occupy diverse settings but share a common normative appeal.

22 Author’s interview with Fred Hooper on August 10, 2018.

23 Although this right has been advanced mostly by political philosophers (Norman 1998; Buchanan 2003), there is some reference to it in international law, however oblique, such as the Savings Clause in the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations (Sterio 2013, 20; Shaw 2014, 187), the 1993 United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, and the 1998 Canadian Supreme Court case on Quebec secession (Crawford 2006, 118–19; Shaw 2014, 186–87). The concept of remedial rights came up indirectly in the US decision to recognize Kosovo. Although it highlights the ethnic cleansing and human rights abuses, the United States shied away from invoking the remedial right and instead called Kosovo a special case that “cannot be seen as a precedent for any other situation in the world today” (Condoleezza Rice 2008, Secretary of State, February 18, 2008).

24 See Kalyvas and Balcells 2010 for a discussion of relative strength and the technology of rebellion.

25 Author’s interview with ULMWP representative in West Papua.

26 In relation to arguments that hold that terrorism is the weapon of the weak (Pape 2003), I contend that secessionist movements are almost always weaker than the home state. It is the degree of weakness that raises the perceived utility of violence versus nonviolent civil resistance.

27 The resolutions in 1960 were Resolution 1514, known as the Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and its annex, Resolution 1541. The 1966 covenants were the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Sterio 2013, 11).

28 The legal right to independence for colonized peoples was awarded to first-order administrative units of overseas European empires via the principle of *uti possidetis juris* (Jackson 1990; Ratner 1996; Bartos 1997; Crawford 2006; Fabry 2010; Sterio 2013). However, this created some ambiguity because many colonies were combined and divided over time and the status of some remains debateable.

The final kind is the de facto state movement, a set that includes Abkhazia and Somaliland, among others. These are the least institutionally integrated. They are functional, breakaway regions that are denied international recognition. In each case, their home state has withheld its consent and successfully persuaded the international community to respect its territorial integrity. On one hand, these are success cases because they have won their independence on an empirical basis and effectively exited the larger state. For many movements such as the Uighur, that alone would be a victory. On the other hand, their success at establishing de facto statehood has come at a cost. The secessionists have prevailed and established a state in empirical terms, but, as a result, reduced or minimized their points of contact with the home state. They cannot engage so easily in forms of civil disobedience or terrorism or electoral competition precisely because they have broken off and are now separated from the home state by a militarized border such as the Green Line that separates Cyprus from Northern Cyprus. Instead of a complex situation of dual and overlapping sovereignty, the two sides are clearly separated by linear boundaries.²⁹ In other words, they cannot compel the state to make a change because they have little direct leverage. Instead, they have to settle for defending the border and deterring the home state from attacking. In an interview with Masis Mayilian, the Foreign Minister of Nagorno Karabakh, I was told that their separation from Azerbaijan forces them to focus on deterrence.³⁰ Overall, de facto state movements develop a *status quo* bias that can end in a half step (or local maximum) between reintegration and full independence (Caspersen 2012, 47).

Although de facto state movements can look passive and status quo biased where compellence is concerned, they are ardent practitioners in the art of normative appeal. These groups have strong incentives to appear state-like and engage in as much diplomatic behavior as possible. They cannot appeal so easily to norms regarding human rights or abuses by the state because they have so little contact with the state. Instead, they try to appeal to a normative argument that has had some resonance in recent decades: that good governance and democratic values establish standards that warrant status as a sovereign state, that they have earned their sovereignty.³¹ To some extent this becomes a waiting game and it is no surprise

29 See Wood (2003, 121) and Kalyvas (2006, 88) for consequences of dual sovereignty in civil war.

30 Interview with Masis Mayilian on June 3, 2019.

31 This argument gained some momentum after the partial international recognition of Kosovo (Berg 2009; Fabry 2010; Caspersen 2015, 395–97). It resembles what Crawford (2006, 382) calls the Canning Test: the recog-

that these movements can endure in a frozen status for decades, locked in a diplomatic contest with the home state. As Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu, former Foreign Minister to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, said: “The Greek Cypriots [Republic of Cyprus] are in the club, and they have been successful at persuading the world that we are an outlaw ethnic minority.”³²

Overall, these six kinds capture variation on the international strategic playing field. I contend that it is useful to study them as a set, because most secessionist movements will exhibit characteristics of more than one kind. Just as the Catalans have contemplated civil resistance alongside their electoral efforts, some groups such as the Polisario Front wonder whether a return to violence would get them further than continued nonviolent civil resistance.³³ The Kanak secessionists of New Caledonia have used civil resistance and violence at various points, and it is only in the last twenty years that their efforts have been exclusively institutional. There is now a robust research effort to understand the strategic and tactical choices of social movements and rebel groups (Pape 2003; Kalyvas and Balcells 2010; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Tarrow 2011; Sorens 2012; Stanton 2013; Schock 2013; Cunningham 2014; Jo 2015; Macleod 2015; Huang 2016; Balcells 2017; Coggins 2017; Krause 2017; Fazal 2018; Stewart 2018; Horowitz, Perkoski, and Potter 2018). My theory contributes to this literature by specifying the relationship between the specific setting of secessionist movements and their tactical choices.

Critics might challenge my theory by arguing that I assume unitary action, elide state agency, or read too much strategic thinking into secessionist behavior. It is true that secessionist movements are often divided in terms of their leadership, command structure, and/or objective (Kalyvas 2006; Cunningham 2014; Seymour, Bakke, and Cunningham 2016; Balcells 2017; Krause 2017), but, anecdotally, I have been told that division both helps and hurts.³⁴ Moreover, as Roeder (2018) discusses in a recent

dition criteria used by the nineteenth-century British statesman George Canning, whereby the aspiring nation had to show their independence from their former sovereign as a self-evident fact.

32 Author’s interview with Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu on April 16, 2018.

33 Author’s interview with Polisario Front representative. One official told me that the divisions in the West

34 Papuan leadership traditionally undermined their ability to negotiate with Indonesia. In contrast, James Tanis stated that the existence of the radical/militant wing under Francis Ona gave the moderate Bougainvillean leadership greater leverage when negotiating with PNG

book, secessionist leaders need to win over a decisive majority of their platform population. Likewise, I do not directly model the countersecession strategies of states.³⁵ These are all elements of the larger picture, but by controlling the scope of the study as I have, I can conduct a more comprehensive analysis of tactical variation.

Finally, secessionists regularly make bad strategic decisions. Quite often this is because they lack full knowledge of the strategic playing field and/or simply maneuver in a zone of uncertainty. For example, in the wake of the 1998 Biak Massacre, the West Papuan leader Filep Karma stated that he operated under the belief that, if they raised the Morning Star flag on the local water tower and kept it aloft for twenty-four hours, then the UN would recognize West Papuan independence (Macleod 2015, 109–10). When they kept it up for forty-eight hours, and recognition did not come, and the Indonesian authorities still cracked down violently, Karma concluded that “this theory is not true.” Similarly, Catalan *independentistas* have typically expressed a faith in the willingness of the European Union to step in should the tensions escalate. There is surely a point at which a prominent leader such as Angela Merkel would apply pressure on the Spanish Government to negotiate with Catalonia, but no one can define that point and political leaders often have incentive to avoid doing so. More generally, one can observe a certain amount of hope and wishful thinking in secessionist behavior, but that makes sense when we pause to consider that secession is a form of rebellion, and rebellions are not won by pessimists.

Analysis

This is a theory with testable implications. If the theory is correct, we should expect to see (1) democratized movements that compete electorally and appeal to the freedom to choose; (2) indigenous legal movements that also aim for electoral capture, but highlight their inherent sovereignty in their normative appeals; (3) combative movements facing strong states that engage in nonviolent civil resistance and showcase human rights abuses; (4) combative movements facing weak states that adopt violent forms of compellence and appeal to norms regarding human rights; (5) decolonial movements that adopt different tactics of compellence depending on context and appeal to norms related to decolonization; and (6) de facto state movements that are unable to engage in com-

pellence, but appeal to the concept of earned sovereignty. Table 1 presents these hypotheses in an easy-to-read fashion. Although secessionist movements won't fall neatly into these categories, general patterns should emerge in a large-N analysis. In the sections that follow I first describe the data and then organize the analysis around the two dependent variables: compellence and normative appeal.

Data

I test my hypotheses using original data on secessionist tactics. The dataset includes 136 secessionist movements between 1946 and 2011. This set is a modification of Griffiths' secessionist data: it focuses on the post-1945 period and excludes classic cases of decolonization. Therefore, to count, “the movement must last at least one week, include at least [one hundred] people, lay claim to a territory no smaller than [one hundred] square kilometers, possess a flag,” declare independence, and lay claim to a territory that is contiguous with the larger state.³⁶ All told, twenty-four of the 136 movements (18 percent) achieved full sovereign independence.

To conduct the analysis, I divide all 136 secessionist movements into the six kinds of movement listed in Table 1. Crucially, the movements are not sorted because of their chosen tactics—a move that would result in circular reasoning—but for reasons pertaining to their local conditions. I use the conditions to predict the tactics. Figure 2 depicts the decision tree with which I use the presence or absence of conditions to sort the movements. I begin by identifying the de facto state movements, arguing that their disconnected relationship with the home state prevented them from engaging in standard compellence tactics. I count seven as de facto state movements: Abkhazia (1991 onward); Gagauzia (1991–1995), Nagorno Karabakh (1991 onward), Somaliland (1991 onward), South Ossetia (1991 onward), Transnistria (1991 onward), and Northern Cyprus (1974

36 The size criteria filter micromovements such as the Principality of Snake Hill. Griffiths (2015, 733) notes that “a movement begins when (1) a declaration of independence is made, or (2) a secessionist conflict begins and a declaration follows later, or (3) secessionists begin nonviolent political action (for example, forming a secessionist political party), and a declaration follows later. A movement ends when (1) the group formally renounces its independence claim, or (2) an agreement is struck granting independence or some other concession short of independence, or (3) five years pass without secessionist activity.”

(author's interview with James Tanis on October 12, 2012).

35 This is a developing research area (Ker-Lindsay 2012; Butt 2017; Weill 2018).

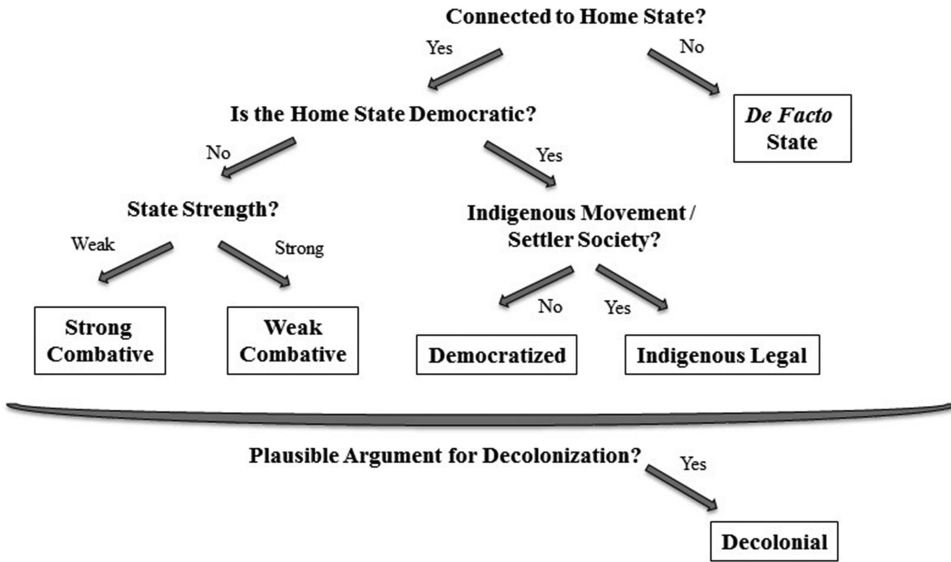


Figure 2. Decision tree for sorting tactical kinds

onward), the only one whose beginning did not coincide with the Cold War. To construct this list I take a conservative position on the work of both Caspersen (2012) and Florea (2014), arguing that many of their de facto states should not count according to my terms because they were in the midst of a civil war (Chechnya) or still integrated politically (Iraqi Kurdistan) with the larger state. This resulted in the exclusion of some borderline cases, such as Tamil Eelam, but in my conception a de facto state movement is completely severed from the larger state and has endured as such. Such cases are rare, for, as Mampilly (2011, 112–14) recounts, even the residents of Tamil Eelam continued to receive public benefits from the Sri Lankan state during the years of conflict—the two were never completely sundered.

The next decision point in the sorting pertained to the institutional setting. A total of forty-four movements counted as high institutional, meaning that the larger state possessed sound democratic institutions. To qualify, the larger state had to meet at least two of the following conditions: (1) be coded as a democracy by Boix, Miller, Sebastian Rosato (2013); (2) be coded as 6 or higher on the Polity2 score by the Polity IV Project, a commonly threshold for democracy; (3) be coded as 5 or higher on the ID score in the Polyarchy Dataset, also the chosen threshold for democracy (Vanhanen 2000). The purpose behind this triangular coding was to take a conservative position and filter the borderline cases that may have counted in one dataset but not the others. Of these forty-four movements, only three counted as indigenous legal

on account of their status in settler societies: (1) Hawaii since 1994; (2) Lokatah since 2007; and (3) the Maori since 1975.³⁷

Combative movements account for eighty-one cases (59 percent of the total). These are identified by the fact that they are integrated with the larger state, located in weak or nondemocracies, and are unable to make a persuasive appeal to decolonization. The difference between the two kinds turns on the strength of the state. I determine that twenty-nine of the movements faced strong states and fifty-two opposed weak states based on the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score of the state given in the Correlates of War (COW) National Material Capabilities index. Here I use the average CINC score (0.032) of the home states in the secession data to divide the set. Although this is an imperfect proxy given that it does not factor in the actual strength of the movement—there is no data to my knowledge that provides a CINC-like score for secessionist movements—the strength of the larger state should be a good predictor of the balance between the two parties. Nevertheless, I do run a robustness check in the analysis that combines the two sets to study the relationship between tactics and the strength of the state.

The final tactical kind is the decolonial movement. As Figure 2 illustrates, the defining feature here is not

37 The dataset ends in 2011 and thus excludes movements such as the Murrawarri Republic that declared independence in 2013.

the degree of integration with the state, whether that state is democratic or particularly strong, but how the independence-seeking nation is viewed in relation to decolonization. Here, I examine whether the region is listed on the UN List of Non-Self-Governing Territories. For nations on that list, I also look at their colonial administrative status at the moment of independence for the larger state of which they became a part (Bartos 1997). Determining eligibility for decolonization via the application of the principle of *uti possedetis* (as you possess) requires the determination of a critical date for when administrative status should be assessed. For decolonization, that date is the moment when the colony was scheduled to become independent.

I count five movements as decolonial: Somaliland (1960), Southern Cameroon (1960), Western Sahara (1963), West Papua (1963), and East Timor (1975). This is a conservative rendering. Western Sahara is an easy choice because it is on the UN list, the only territory currently on that list that has mounted a formal secessionist movement.³⁸ Somaliland, or British Somaliland as it was called, was separate and independent in 1960 when it was joined to the Italian Somaliland.³⁹ Southern Cameroon (or British Cameroon) was attached to French Cameroon (Cameroon) at the moment of independence in 1960 (Minahan 1996, 62). Finally, both West Papua (Irian Jaya) and East Timor were separate administrative units of different countries at the time of accession by Indonesia in 1963 and 1975, respectively. All five territories were first-order administrative units in their own right and therefore can make a plausible argument for eligibility for decolonization. Other secessionist movements have certainly attempted to place their cause under the banner of decolonization. Bougainville's administrative origins are different from Papua New Guinea—a point made by the secessionist leaders in their argument for independence⁴⁰—but it has nevertheless been a part of the larger territory since 1899. Similarly, the Anyi have argued that they had separate territorial rights under the French and therefore should have qualified for decolonization separate from the Ivory Coast (Minahan 1996, 483). But whatever their merits in general, these

38 Note that, while both New Caledonia and French Polynesia (both on the list) possess strong secessionist undercurrents, neither has made a formal declaration of independence and thus do not count as a movement according to the criteria used in Griffiths' dataset.

39 Uniquely, Somaliland counts as both a de facto and decolonial movement.

40 Author's interview with James Tanis on October 12, 2012.

Table 2. Combination and frequency of compellence tactics

Combinations	Frequency
Institutional	9
Institutional + civil resistance	20
Institutional + violence	9
Institutional + civil resistance + violence	28
Civil resistance	8
Violence	9
Civil resistance + violence	53
N	136

arguments have less valence where the guidelines for decolonization are concerned.

Next, I code the two dependent variables (compellence and normative appeal) as follows. To study compellence tactics, I use data on the chosen methods of secessionist movements at the time they became active.⁴¹ Here, I model three tactics in which the movements pursue independence via (1) institutional means (e.g., electoral capture, referenda); (2) civil resistance/nonviolent extrainstitutional means (e.g., protests, sit-ins, strikes); and (3) violent extrainstitutional means (e.g., insurgency, terrorism, armed rebellion). These tactics represent different values of the dependent variable (compellence) and can be examined in relation to the tactical setting. Note that many movements used combinations of these different tactics; only twenty-six (19 percent) used only one tactic. Table 2 shows the frequency and combination of selected tactics.

To study normative appeal, I create new data on the rhetoric used by secessionist groups around the time they became active.⁴² Using Factiva and ProQuest, I perform a content analysis of the direct quotations of movement leaders, supporters, participants, and third-party observers. Results are produced by searching on the name of the movement *and* one of the following terms: secession, secede, independence, sovereignty, autonomy, or separatism. For the high-profile and more commonly discussed movements, the number of cited articles is capped at thirty, all randomly selected. For the movements with thirty or fewer results, all articles are used.

41 I search for qualitative evidence of the methods used during the year the movement started and the two years before and after the start. These data were developed in Griffiths and Wasser (2019).

42 Content analysis is done on the start year of the movement and the two years before and after the start. See online appendix for details on coding.

Table 3. Normative appeal search terms

<i>Normative appeal</i>	<i>Search terms</i>
Earned sovereignty	De facto; equal + (status, footing, representation, partnership); (formalize, upgrade, convert, conversion, promotion) + status
Decolonization	Coloni (for derivatives such as decolonization, colonialism); occupation; occupied; liberat (for derivatives such as liberation, liberate)
Freedom to choose	Choose; choice; chosen; determine; decide; decision; democracy; democratic; right to decide (choose) + destiny (or fate or future)
Inherent sovereignty	Inva (for derivatives such as invaded, invade); terra nullius; sovereignty + (never ceded, never relinquished, never eliminated); inherent sovereignty; original sovereignty
Human rights	Genocide; ethnic cleansing; human rights; oppression; repression; suppression; massacre

To conduct the content analysis, I search on terms that lexically captured the meaning behind the different normative appeals. For example, to identify utterances that conveyed the concept of earned sovereignty, I search for “de facto,” combinations of “equal” with “status” or a synonym, or a string that denoted the upgrading or formalization of status. Table 3 lists the different search terms (and strings) that were used for each normative appeal. In some cases, root words such as “coloni” or “liberat” were used.

In summary, the analysis utilizes a dataset of 136 secessionist movements between 1946 and 2011 that are divided into tactical kinds. I then identify the compellence tactics used by each movement and the normative appeals they made. Importantly, the data structure does not capture the tactics used for every year that some long-running movements existed, but rather the period in which they became active according to Griffiths (2016). In some cases, multiple iterations of movements are studied as they started, stopped, and then restarted. Although some details of the complete picture are lost given this approach, I see no reason for why the results should be biased.⁴³ I capture snapshots of the biggest moments when secessionist activity is particularly intense.

43 On the contrary, I suspect that the results would improve in some cases as movements refined their tactics to better fit their situation. For example, Moses Havini, the leader of Bougainville’s diplomatic wing, stated in an interview on February 6, 2013, that he initially sought to portray Bougainville’s cause as one of decolonization, but then gradually dropped that argument as he learned that their colonial history did not fit the guidelines for awarding statehood to colonies. He then switched to a focus on human rights. Overall, a more comprehensive follow-up study that examines each movement across its entire history could reduce the potential for bias in the results.

Compellence

To test my argument, I begin by exploring the relationship between secessionist kinds and their tactics of compellence. In accordance with my theory, I expect (1) that movements in democratic settings (i.e., democratized and indigenous legal) will favor institutional tactics; (2) that movements facing strong states will prefer tactics of non-violent civil resistance; and (3) that movements opposed to weak states will be more likely to choose violent methods. Two caveats are required. First, I predict that decolonial movements will choose compellence tactics that vary with their setting (see Table 1). It turns out that all five of the decolonial movement under examination qualified as combative/weak state movements because of their local conditions, and I therefore place them in that group. Second, the de facto type is an outlier because these movements are sundered from the home state and therefore lack the ability to engage in compelling acts. As a result, they are removed from the analysis in this section.

I test my argument in two ways. First, I look at the simple relationship between kind and tactic. As stated, I anticipate that secessionist movements in highly institutionalized settings—that is, both the democratized and indigenous legal movements—are more likely to adopt tactics that use the institutional process. An analysis of the data reveals that a total of forty-four movements took place in democracies, and twenty-six (59 percent) of these used institutional methods. In comparison, only thirty-seven of the remaining eighty-six movements used institutional methods, or 43 percent. The difference between the two averages is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.⁴⁴ I next look at combative movements. I hypothesize that movements facing weak states are more likely to use violence than movements opposed to strong states. Overall, fifty-one (91 percent) of the fifty-seven movements facing weak states used violent

44 The *p* value = 0.08.

methods, while only twelve (41 percent) of the twenty-nine movements opposed to strong states did so. In statistical terms, these averages are significantly different.⁴⁵ Finally, combative movements that were challenging strong states were more likely to use nonviolent civil resistance methods than violence. Of these movements, nineteen (66 percent) of the twenty-nine used nonviolent civil resistance, whereas only twelve (41 percent) of the twenty-nine movements adopted violence. Again, the difference between these averages is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.⁴⁶ Overall, these findings are consistent with my expectations.

Second, for robustness I test these relationships in a unified manner using logistic regressions. Here, I put aside the sorting of secessionist kinds and focus exclusively on the type of regime (democracy, nondemocracy) and overall strength (CINC score) of the home state, modeled as independent variables in the analysis. I use two control variables: (1) the number of peaceful secessions from the same state over the previous five years and (2) the ethnic distinctiveness of the aspiring nation.⁴⁷ Violence, nonviolent civil resistance, and institutional tactics are used as dependent variables in three separate regressions. This format represents a different way to test the hypotheses.

The results are listed in Table 4. Democracy is negatively and significantly related to the use of violence and positively and significantly related to the use of institutional methods. A secessionist movement is 23 percent more likely to use institutional methods when the larger state is a democracy. Meanwhile, there is a highly significant relationship between the strength of state and the choice of secessionist tactics. Movements facing weak states are far more likely to use violence. In addition, secessionist movements in strong states are also more likely to use institutional means. One of the factors driving this finding is that strong states are quite often democracies and therefore in a better position to provide institutional options. Interestingly, the use of nonviolent civil resistance methods does not correlate strongly with either regime type or state strength.

Overall, the results of both tests are broadly consistent with my theory. Secessionist movements in highly

institutionalized settings are more likely to compete electorally and less likely to use violence. Meanwhile, secessionists in weak states are more likely to utilize violence, particularly when democratic options are unavailable. Finally, nonviolent methods of civil resistance are harder to predict; according to the regression analysis, they appear to be used in diverse settings (democratic and nondemocratic, strong and weak states). However, as the first set of tests shows, combative movements that face strong states are more likely to use nonviolent civil resistance methods and less likely to adopt violent tactics than movements that face weak states.

Normative Appeal

The content analysis of the rhetorical arguments made by all of the secessionist movements produces results that are consistent with my central argument. The analysis returned a total of 3,479 articles, an average of twenty-six per movement, and within this set the search terms came up 909 times. As Table 5 illustrates, there is a strong correlation between tactical kind and the predicted normative appeal, signified in the table in each case by a shaded cell. Note that the two combative kinds are collapsed into one category because it is predicted that both will stress human rights in their normative appeals.

The appeal to earned sovereignty was the primary normative appeal for de facto movements. The argument that the movement in question has earned its status and should be upgraded or recognized came up in fifty-two of the sixty-eight utterances, 76 percent of the total. The remaining kinds used that language far less commonly. Indeed, the average rate of use between de facto movements and decolonial movements—the second most likely kind to appeal to that norm—passes a difference-of-means test.⁴⁸ This striking result is depicted in Figure 3 by the soaring black percentile column on the far left.

The language of decolonization came up frequently in the content analysis, accounting for nearly a quarter of the results. As predicted, this is the argument of choice for decolonial movements—it was returned in thirty-four of the seventy-five (45 percent) utterances. These movements appeal to decolonization more than any other norm, and, as Figure 3 illustrates, this was a rate of use that is more than double that of their next most commonly used argument (human rights). They also appealed to the norm more than any other kind of movement. With the exception of indigenous legal movements, the next most likely kind to appeal to the norm, the average rate

45 The p value = 0.01.

46 The p value = 0.06.

47 Both variables are taken from Griffiths (2015). The EthnoDistinct variable captures the religious and/or linguistic difference between the secessionist group and the dominant culture of the state, coded as (0) no difference; (1) either religiously or ethnically different; or (2) both religiously and ethnically different.

48 The difference in these averages is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level (p value = 0.01).

Table 4. Logistic regressions of secessionist tactics

	Violence	Tactic/method civil resistance	Institutional
Democracy	-0.73* (0.48)	0.27(0.50)	0.10** (0.43)
% change	-15%		23%
CINC score	-23.63*** (5.41)	-0.97(5.19)	18*** (5.08)
% change	-33%		38%
Recent secessions	-0.02(0.11)	0.26(0.57)	1.32(1.15)
% change			
EthnoDistinct	0.21(0.30)	0.00(0.31)	-0.31(0.28)
% change			
Constant	1.95*** (0.41)	1.27*** (0.35)	-0.80** (0.32)
N	127	127	127
Wald Chi ²	(4)24.97	(4)1.32	(4)23.44
Probability > Chi ²	0	0.86	0
Pseudo R ²	0.16	0.01	0.13
Log likelihood	-64.14	-63.72	-76.3

Notes: (1) Statistical significance levels: *p < 0.10; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01. (2) Marginal change calculated by moving the democracy variable from 0 to 1 while holding the other variables at their mean. The marginal change for CINC is calculated by moving the value from 1 SD (0.044) below the mean (0.03) to 1 SD above while holding democracy at its mode (0) and the other variables at their mean.

Table 5. Distribution of normative appeals by kind of secessionist movement

Tactical kind	Earned sovereignty	Decolonization	Freedom to choose	Inherent sovereignty	Human rights	Total
1 De facto	52(76%)	5(7%)	4(6%)	1(1%)	6(9%)	68
2 Decolonial	10(13%)	34(45%)	10(13%)	7(9%)	14(19%)	75
3 Democratized	33(12%)	82(29%)	125(45%)	12(4%)	28(10%)	280
4 Indigenous legal	0(0%)	13(32%)	4(10%)	20(49%)	4(10%)	41
5 Combative (All)	48(11%)	81(18%)	113(25%)	13(3%)	190(43%)	445
Total	143(16%)	215(24%)	256(28%)	53(6%)	242(27%)	909

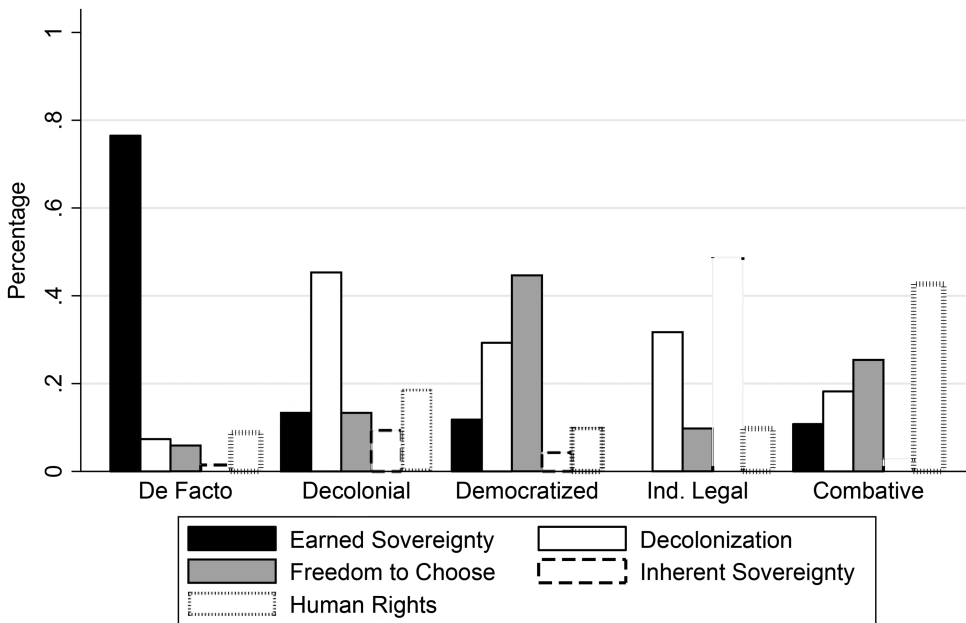


Figure 3. Rate of normative appeal by tactical setting

of use by decolonial movements was significantly different from all other kinds.⁴⁹

As theorized, democratized movements commonly appealed to the freedom to choose their political fate. This appeal came up in 125 of a total of 280 utterances (48 percent). Democratized movements are statistically more likely to use this argument than any other argument.⁵⁰ In addition, democratized movements invoked the right to choose more commonly than the other tactical kinds. The next most likely kind(s) to use the argument are combative movements, an interesting finding that I return to below. Importantly, the freedom to choose is the most frequently returned norm in the content analysis, coming up in 28 percent of the results.

The argument regarding inherent sovereignty was the least commonly used normative appeal, uttered in only 6 percent of the results. However, as expected, the indigenous legal movements were the ones who regularly used it. It appears in nearly half of the articles that discuss secessionism in relation to Hawaii, the Lokatah, and the Maori. Interestingly, these groups are also likely to appeal to decolonization, though they did so less frequently. It is important to not overstate these findings given the small sample size. Nevertheless, it is clear that these groups use similar tactics when advancing their cause.

The analysis produces interesting and nuanced results for the combative movements. As predicted, combative movements appeal to human rights norms more than any other rhetorical argument.⁵¹ The high percentile column on the far right of Figure 3 depicts this outcome. In addition, combative movements are more than twice as likely as the next mostly likely kind, decolonial, to appeal to human rights. That said, the set of combative movements is larger and more heterogenous than the other kinds, and other normative appeals were frequently used. For example, the freedom to choose argument was used in 25 percent of the utterances. The appeal to decolonization was also common. Nevertheless, despite the

relatively varied character of the combative movements, human rights were the most common theme in their rhetorical arguments.

Overall, the results support my hypotheses regarding normative argumentation. Secessionist movements tend to appeal to the norms we would expect given their setting. This normative language is evident in the statements made about their causes at the time they became active. These patterns are observable in Figure 3 and are statistically significant.

Conclusion

At the strategic level all secessionist movements are the same. They need to make a change in order to become an internationally recognized sovereign state. The surest way to win recognition is to get the consent of the home state. In the absence of that consent, secessionists do what amounts to an end run to get the international community to either apply pressure on the home state or bypass it completely and recognize the aspiring nation. That strategy is shaped by the formal and informal rules and principles that guide recognition. It is at the tactical level that secessionist movements vary because different local conditions favor different tactics of compellence and normative appeal. As the recent events in Catalonia demonstrate, movements in democratic settings will work through the institutional apparatus of the state to force the home state to negotiate. Movements in different, less democratic settings, such as West Papua, are more likely to choose civil resistance and/or violence and appeal to international norms regarding human rights.

My theoretical model clarifies the intentions and behavior of diverse secessionist movements by highlighting what they have in common and how they vary. The model accurately predicts the tactics that different movements would use depending on their tactical setting. Of course, not all movements fit the model perfectly. Some constitute blends of different kinds, and some are located in settings that do not favor a clear set of tactics. Further research should examine the hybrid movements to understand their tactical choices.

Critics may question the wisdom of secessionist strategy and tactics by pointing out that the odds are low that any one group will achieve sovereign independence. Indeed, they may challenge the utility of a theoretical framework that explains the behavior of actors that typically fail to reach their objective. I submit that secessionist strategy is an important object of study given that the resulting behavior can destabilize states and generate violence. Moreover, nearly one in five of the secessionist movements in this dataset (twenty-four of 136) achieved

49 For example, the average rate of use for decolonial movements is statistically different from democratized movements (the most common kind to use the norm after decolonial and indigenous legal) at the 90 percent confidence level (p value = 0.06)

50 The next most likely normative appeal for democratized movements is decolonization, but these rates pass a difference-of-means test at the 90 percent confidence level (p value = 0.07).

51 A difference-of-means test between the rate of appeal to human rights versus the freedom to choose is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level (p value = 0.01).

independence. The chances are not great, but numerous groups are clearly willing to take them because of the political, economic, and legal benefits that come with sovereignty.

Relatedly, my analysis also sheds light on an important question related to secession: Does the incentive structure promote the use of violence? The successful movements will be those who can compel their government and/or the international community to make a change. Doing so is easier when an aspiring nation can pitch their cause as deserving or unique and graft it on to one of the more accepted rhetorical arguments for why a nation should count for independence. But for those groups who cannot differentiate themselves so easily, who have fewer institutional options, and who face a weak home state, violence is more likely.

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