Globalization and Separatism: The Influence of Internal and External Interdependence on the Strategies of Separatism

Ryan D. Griffiths and Ivan Savić
PhD Candidates, Political Science, Columbia University, New York

Abstract
At the heart of all separatist movements is the idea that the community in question would be better off handling its own affairs, including its economic affairs. The existence of economic globalization introduces a paradox: secession cannot produce full autonomy in economic matters because states with smaller economies tend to have less policy autonomy. This paper argues that separatist movements will use very different strategies depending on the level of external (supra-national) and internal (sub-national) economic integration. Separatist groups in developed states (which tend to be integrated both at the domestic and international level) are more likely to look to political means and to support supra-national economic institutions to reduce their dependence on the central government, while such groups in developing countries (which tend to have lower levels of both types of integration) are more likely to use traditional, often violent, means of achieving independence. We test these arguments by examining the strategies of long standing separatist movements in Scotland, Quebec, Biafra and Tamil Eelam.

Keywords
separatism, globalization, interdependence, civil war

Introduction
Separatist movements around the world are quite diverse. They are found in a broad spectrum of countries: in developing and developed nations, under democratic and authoritarian regimes, in highly-centralized states and loose federations. The goals of separatist movements vary from calls for increased autonomy to demands for full independence. Among those seeking full independence there is also a great deal of variation in terms of how they envision post-independence relations with the rump state. While for some this is left vague, for others post-separation political and economic relations form an integral part of their overall strategy. Finally, there is a great deal of variation in the means that separatist movements adopt to achieve their goals. Some use
non-violent methods such as grassroots activism or participation in national elections while others choose violent tactics ranging from terrorism and low-level insurgency to full-scale civil war.

We need only to cite a few separatist movements to illustrate this diversity. On the one hand, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka want full independence for their homeland and use violent means to achieve it. On the other hand, the Scottish National Party is dedicated to Scottish independence through democratic means and in the context of EU membership. Similarly, the Party Québécois has declared “Sovereignty-Partnership” with Canada as its ultimate goal and has attempted to achieve this goal through electoral politics and popular referenda on independence. Interestingly, the successor states of both Czechoslovakia and the Former Yugoslavia all expressed interest in joining the EU and three have done so. Slovenia, for example, left Yugoslavia in part over grievances about the political and economic constraints imposed by the federation. However, it is now a member of a union in which it arguably has less influence over common economic and political policy.

We argue that a great deal of this variation is explained by the different economic constraints and opportunities that the process of globalization imposes on separatist movements. Our argument proceeds from two key assumptions. First, all sub-national units seek greater autonomy. Second, the benefits of increased autonomy are tempered by economic tradeoffs. Whereas small states in an economically-closed world may need to forego some level of autonomy in order to maintain economic well-being, the same states can seek greater autonomy with fewer economic constraints in an economically open world. We argue that economic factors have an indirect and complex effect on separatist movements. Our basic argument can be summarized by the following three propositions:

1. **The Economic Calculus of Separatism:** In order to be successful, a separatist movement must consider the economic effects of its decision to seek greater autonomy or outright independence. The struggle for greater autonomy, even if it is peaceful, has economic consequences, which the separatist and the central government must consider as part of their overall strategy. Each separatist movement must address the following questions: How will the movement be funded? What will be the economic consequences of a particular strategy or action? What will the economic future look like if greater autonomy or independence is achieved? This is not to

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1 These assumptions are more or less the same as those of Allesina and Spoloare in their work on the “size of states”. That is, states have to balance the benefits of being big (economies of scale, larger relative military potential, etc.) with the benefits of being small (the locus of decision-making can be moved closer to home). See Allesina and Spoloare (2003).