

INTRODUCTION

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In 1945, there were 74 independent countries. Today there are 195.¹ The breakup of colonial empires, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and various secessions all over the world have led to the creation of numerous new sovereign states since World War II. Historically, the expansion and contraction of states has resulted from the competition between two living forces: secessionism and counter-secessionism. Secession is the “detachment of a territory from an existing state with the aim of creating a new state on the detached territory” (Pavkovic & Radan, 2011). By contrast, counter-secession could be defined as an attempt to prevent the break-up of states as well as their recognition by other states at the international level. Movements of secession and counter-secession compete and frequently clash over the formation of new states and one of the goals of this book is to understand the strategies of actors in favour of changing political borders as well as the reactions of those who want to prevent the break-up of states.

Secession has been examined at length in the field of political theory, comparative politics, history and law but it has been little studied by scholars of International Relations (IR). The rise in the number of independent nations has driven social scientists to identify the domestic drivers of ethno-national mobilisation, the cross-national determinants of secession and the political and economic roots of separatist movements. With regard to its consequences, the scholarly literature has also considered the political dynamics that follow an unsuccessful attempt to create a new state entity: regional separatism, ethnic conflict, and various centrifugal forces. To put it differently, most research on separatism has focused on examining how secessionist movements make a moral argument for the creation of new states or how states react to the potential break-up of their sovereignty. With a few notable exceptions, the field of IR has not studied the creation of new polities and their international recognition as sovereign states (Coggins, 2011; Ker-Lindsay, 2012; Cunningham, 2014; Griffiths, 2016).

The origin of this volume was a conference on “Secessionism and Counter-secessionism: An International Relations Perspective” held at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) on October 5th–6th

1. As of September 2017, the United Nations has 193 full members plus two observer states: the Vatican City and Palestine. Taiwan and Kosovo are not UN members, nor are the unrecognised states of North Cyprus, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Crimea, Somaliland and Bougainville, among others.

2017. The two-day conference was widely attended by public policy experts but also by a variety of local stakeholders interested in secession: from academics and think-tankers to politicians, elected officials and diplomats. The conference attracted considerable media attention and public interest, most probably because there was intense discussion during 2017 about the unilateral attempt by Catalan nationalists to disassociate themselves from Spain, reject the latter's political and legal authority and create a new sovereign state. Although the failed Catalan effort was mentioned recurrently during the debates at CIDOB, the main contribution of the conference was to promote an integrated approach to state birth and state death that combined approaches from comparative politics and International Relations. One of the take-home points of the conference was that the proliferation of states since 1945 can only be understood as a two-level game, where movements in favour of independence (and actors in favour of the status quo) compete for support at the domestic level while opposing each other for foreign sympathies and international recognition at the global level.

Volume structure

The trend towards state proliferation that has characterised the past few decades has led scholars to conclude that we are living in “an age of secession” (Griffiths, 2016). In order to understand the phenomenon of secession, this book is structured into three main sections devoted to: (1) the international system; (2) the demands of those in favour of independence; and (3) the strategic response from those who want to preserve territorial integrity.

The first section on the international system and the European Union is devoted to examining the opportunities and constraints for frontier-altering provided by the current international order. **Diego Muro** argues that there is no legal right, under international or domestic law, to secession. Those wanting to secede and form an independent country lack clear guidance for sorting out which nations merit statehood and which do not. He examines the theory and the practice of secession and counter-secession and concludes that, ultimately, the success of pro-independence movements depends on *realpolitik*, not ideals. **Bridget Coggins** analyses how states respond to secession and examines the main dynamics of state recognition. In order for any new country to gain membership of the international community the new state must secure the recognition of an overwhelming majority of states, especially the most powerful and influential among them. **Matt Qvortrup** analyses the factors conducive to recognising independence referendums. Ultimately it is not referendums or public opinion that counts, but international recognition, especially by the three Western powers of the UN Security Council: the USA, UK and France. The espousal of lofty legal, democratic and philosophical principles means very little when it comes to recognising new states. Finally, **Bruno Coppieters** examines the EU policies of engagement with “contested states”, which are polities that have *de facto* control of their territory but are not universally recognised as states. He argues that there is no single EU strategy towards states that lack diplomatic recognition, but a variety of individual policies as seen in the cases of Montenegro and Kosovo. The EU does not have the competences to recognise new states because this is the exclusive responsibility of member states.

The second section on case studies focuses on the ways four secessionist movements have pursued their ambitions for independence. **Nicola McEwen** provides an overview of the process that led to and legitimised the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. She also discusses some of the similarities between Scotland and Catalan nationalism, especially in the type of polity the advocates of independence are seeking and the institutional barriers in the way of achieving these goals. **Bart Maddens** assesses the strength of separatism in Flanders and discusses both the discursive and the practical strategies Flemish nationalists have developed against Belgium, with a special focus on the role of the EU in these strategies. He also provides a brief summary of the current political situation and its possible implications. **André Lecours** argues that Quebec is exceptional among all cases of nationalist movements in liberal democracies, because governments formed by the secessionist Parti Québécois (PQ) have organised two independence referendums. Thus, the Quebec case offers particularly fertile ground for examining how a secessionist party seeks to convince voters to support independence in a referendum campaign while a host of other actors (within the province, across the country, and around the world) make a case against secession. **Gestur Hovgaard** explores the case of Greenland and the Faroe Islands within the Danish Realm. The chapter provides an introduction to the historical background and the formal relationship between the two jurisdictions and their metropolitan state. It also extends the two cases with an analysis of how increased internal autonomy has evolved in a dynamic interaction with changes in international affairs.

The third and final section focuses on counter-secessionist strategies and the way states facing movements of secession respond to such challenges. **James Ker-Lindsay** examines in depth the case of Cyprus during the course of the last thirty years, where the Cypriot government has been engaged in a relentless battle to prevent the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TNRC)” (or Northern Cyprus, as it is more commonly known), from gaining international recognition. Ker-Lindsay argues that any successful counter-secession strategy is based on four separate but interlocking strands: (1) maintain claim to territory; (2) prevent recognition; (3) stop legitimisation; and (4) pursue legal avenues. **Ryan Griffiths** discusses the reasons why governments deny secession in some cases but not others. He sustains that states and the international community are prepared to permit secession under certain circumstances and the chapter outlines those circumstances by describing three interrelated factors: the international recognition regime; the calculus of state response; and the resulting strategy of secession. **Eckart Woertz** discusses the role of economic arguments over sovereignty disputes. Woertz argues that debates about secession and counter-secession often circle around questions of identity, political history and legal rights. Yet economic grievances and perceived opportunities are as important, if not more so, in secession and counter-secession strategies. His paper provides a comparative overview of economic costs and opportunities for pro-independence movements. **Roland Sturm** focuses on the case of the federal system of Germany and how it has managed to rein in secessionist aspirations in Bavaria. The paper tries to answer the following research question: Why did the strong sense of Bavarian exceptionalism not transmute into secessionism? To explain the paradox of efficient regional identity politics in a non-secessionist environment Sturm discusses both the key roles of the Bavaria Party (BP) and the Christian Social Union (CSU).

Violent to peaceful means

State formation is inextricably linked to war making and the establishment of an economic base to fund it, as the historical record suggests. Nobody put it more succinctly than Charles Tilly when arguing that “war made the state and the state made war” (Tilly 1990). However, as more and more populations were brought together under the political authority of the post-medieval state and boundaries became solidified, there was a surprising decline of socially sanctioned forms of violence. This might not be common wisdom, given the large number of barbaric acts of violence reported daily in the mass media but, on the whole, modernity brought an unforeseen decline in organised violence. The Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker has claimed that violence has been in decline for long stretches of time and that we are probably living in the most peaceful time in our human existence (Pinker, 2011). Similar arguments were put forward by the German sociologist Norbert Elias, who argued that the overall diminution of violence was a central feature of the 20th century compared to the life and times of our forebears (Elias, 1996)

Needless to say, the decline of organised violence in the last few centuries has not been homogeneously distributed and unspeakable human brutality continues to affect some regions more than others. But the key fact about the worldwide decline of violence remains true. Since 1945, there has been a steep drop in the number of interstate wars, deadly ethnic riots and military coups. Various explanations can account for this decline of violence but one of the most persuasive explanations is of a Hobbesian nature, and sustains that the reduction of violence goes hand in hand with the rise of the bureaucratic centralised state, which claims the legitimate use of violence. The argument about the effectiveness of the Westphalian state system in reducing violence can account for variation in a large number of cases and also works in reverse. Whereas strong states prevent internal violence, and polities which are economically interdependent avoid going to war, weak states that lack the capabilities to fully control their territory experience unrest, which explains why much of today’s violent conflict occurs in failed states or zones of anarchy where the dominant actor is weak.

The decline of violence and the rise of alternative means to channel disputes does not necessarily mean that, as John Lennon hoped, “the world will live as one”. As a matter of fact, the prominence of ethnicity and nationalism in war escalated during the second half of the 20th century and peaked during the 1990s. Scholarly estimates put the share of civil wars driven by secessionism at roughly 52% (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Andreas Wimmer has further argued that the share of nationalist wars of secession and ethnic civil wars rose from 25% to 75% over the course of the 20th century (Wimmer, 2012: 27). By the year 2000, over three-quarters of violent conflicts were fought either by groups seeking to establish a separate nation-state or to change the ethnic balance of power within an existing state. Nowadays, ethno-national wars for independence are commonly considered to be the main threat to international peace and regional security in the post-Cold War period (Marshall and Gurr, 2003).

Secessionist crises in which parties hold incompatible goals will continue to unfold in the future but these conflicts will increasingly adopt a peaceful form, particularly in the liberal democratic settings this book focuses on.

The strategic abandonment of violence is conceivably explained by the fact that non-violent methods have proven to have a superior effectiveness (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Movements for self-determination and political independence are part of this trend, possibly because of reduced fears of territorial conquest by economically interdependent states. Other conflict management tools available to accommodate territorial disputes include decentralisation, the celebration of binding referenda or, when none of these options has worked, either partition or secession. All in all, ethnic and national conflict is increasingly managed by non-violent means, at least in the West. This is not to say, of course, that the political conflict over sovereignty will be kind and pleasant, for there is no historical precedent for nation-states willingly relinquishing territory.

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