

The “weight” of territorial issues: Evidence from Catalonia, Scotland, and Northern Ireland¹

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ABSTRACT

Territorial debates complicate the politics of the affected regions, as parties must decide whether to compete on a territorial dimension alongside others, such as redistribution, that have longstanding importance. Yet, empirical evidence is scarce regarding how much voters actually weigh territorial issues against others, and on which issues voters most reward congruent (like-minded) candidates. We theorize that in contexts when such issues are salient, they have a greater weight relative to others due to their identity-oriented nature. We present evidence from a conjoint experiment embedded in simultaneously fielded surveys in three European regions with active territorial disputes: Catalonia, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. We find that individuals’ preferences on the territorial issue matter more than other issues for candidate choice: the reward (punishment) of congruent (incongruent) candidates is greater, and individuals are less prepared to concede on this issue. Our results have broader comparative implications for political competition in multidimensional spaces where territorial disputes are present.

Keywords: secessionism, voting behavior, conjoint experiment, territorial disputes, substate nationalism, United Kingdom, Spain

1. Introduction

Territorial issues are politically salient and contentious in many countries, particularly in multinational democracies where there is political competition at the substate level. In such circumstances, territorial status is often conceived as a zero-sum contest where compromise is difficult. Yet, when selecting political candidates or parties, especially within the contested regions, voters must choose among contending policy packages, and territorial status can be one of multiple issues over which

politicians compete. Political candidates generally make appeals based on longstanding concerns of economic policy or issues related to the traditional left-right cleavage, but territorial issues are also of increased relevance.³ Yet, despite rising attention to territorial debates in politics, we still know little about how voters weight different issues and, in particular, are lacking clear evidence about how much the territorial issue dominates the voter decision calculus relative to other important issues.

Territorial or self-determination challenges have increased steadily since the 1960s and such issues are currently relevant in about half the countries in the international system.⁴ Contestation over substate territorial status (i.e., more or less autonomy, border changes, or independence) has been or remains a politically relevant issue in many multinational countries, such as Canada, France, India, Indonesia, Serbia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, among others. Much scholarship focuses on the cross-national correlates of these movements and of their success,⁵ with a growing literature also addressing individual-level determinants of secessionist preferences.⁶ A less explored but important comparative question is how much individuals in such disputed regions where competition can be multi-dimensional actually weigh territorial issues relative to other common policy issues. How does territorial integrity (or territorial change) fare on a platform compared to other policy positions? How much does policy congruence between voters and candidates (i.e., when voter and candidate preferences are in agreement) matter? How do voters make policy trade-offs if politicians align with their territorial preferences but not with their preferences on other issues? Evidence addressing these questions is needed because political competition often involves multiple issue dimensions, whereby territorial issues either compete or are bundled with other issues. Parties or candidates must

offer and campaign over many policy proposals, and voters must ultimately choose one party or candidate. It is not obvious which voter policy preferences are most relevant and what accounts for electoral decisions.

A common assumption is that parties or candidates make the territorial issue (in the parlance of some models, a “second dimension”) salient because it is politically beneficial.⁷ Yet, it remains unclear if voters actually weigh territorial issues more so than others. It is also uncertain what net electoral reward or punishment political candidates obtain from taking such positions. Candidates may gain voters on this issue, but lose voters on others.

This paper empirically assesses whether in substate contested regions, territorial issues are in fact weighted more heavily than other policy issues.⁸ We use evidence from a conjoint survey, the most appropriate design to assess voter preferences over multiple issue dimensions,⁹ which we implement simultaneously in three west European regions, Catalonia (Spain), Scotland (UK), and Northern Ireland (UK). Catalonia and Scotland are two natural cases to compare because of the general absence of political violence and the increased drive for independence in both regions since the 2010s.¹⁰ Northern Ireland presents an instructive contrasting case on the importance of territorial issues, due to the irredentist nature of its nationalism (as the territorial issue is about potential reunification with Ireland),¹¹ the history of political violence during “the Troubles” (1969-1998) and in its aftermath,¹² and the presence of a religious cleavage overlapping with the ethnonationalist one.

Our study is the first to our knowledge to assess directly the relative weight of territorial issues, simultaneously, in three substate regions. The core design has individuals evaluate multiple pairs of hypothetical political candidates who take different positions on many issues, allowing us to disentangle the importance of each

of the different dimensions in voting decisions.¹³ We find that the territorial issue is weighted more than any other issue when taking into account voter preferences. We show that while congruence matters across all issues (unsurprisingly and reassuringly, individuals favor candidates with congruent positions), congruence on territorial preferences has a stronger impact than on other issues. For example, a pro-independence and pro-spending individual tends to favor a pro-independence candidate over a pro-spending candidate.

Our results have implications for not just why substate parties choose to make the territorial issue salient but also why opposition coordination against such parties or candidates may be difficult. While we do not theorize nor test models of political heresthetics,¹⁴ our results shed light on why, once a territorial dimension is invoked in political competition, it may become electorally difficult to withdraw it from the political debate.¹⁵

2. Related literature and theory

In substate territories where self-determination issues are salient, a vocal plurality or majority of citizens often demands independence or a change in borders. Others prefer to keep the status quo (or even less autonomy for such regions) while still others hold intermediate territorial preferences, between maximum territorial change and the status quo.¹⁶ Many studies dwell on the individual-level factors or attitudes that correlate with such preferences,¹⁷ and most find a strong correlation between substate national identity and support for territorial change.¹⁸

A complementary literature examines the importance of territorial views for electoral choice. The bulk of these studies grapple with ascertaining how much a candidate or party's territorial position mobilizes individuals to vote for them. A

common assumption is that the activation of territorial issues has been electorally beneficial to such parties, partially because individuals come to regard territoriality as the most important issue.¹⁹ The empirical studies on the relative weight of territorial issues are however mostly observational studies that examine voter-candidate issue congruence by taking as the quantities of interest the difference in self- versus party-placement on different scales and issues, and correlating these differences with party choice.²⁰ Few studies address in a precise way whether the territorial issue is in fact electorally beneficial to candidates relative to other issues, and if so, by how much.²¹ This is unfortunate, as the reality of political competition is that even though political elites may decide to make the territorial issue salient, à la Riker's "heresthetics,"²² candidates and parties also compete along other policies, including classic "first-dimension" politics such as the size of the state and redistribution. This means that voters must make political choices on the positions that politicians take besides that of the territorial issue, and it is relevant to ascertain how much of these issues weigh in their decision-making.

Overall, while the empirical literature has focused on the correlates of territorial preferences and support for corresponding political parties, it remains unclear if and how much territorial preferences actually affect political selection, and how these preferences are weighted in more realistic political competition scenarios. We hypothesize that voters will tend to give more weight to territorial issues than other commonly contested political issues. We pose two non-mutually exclusive reasons, drawing on previous research on territorial preferences.

First, an ample literature demonstrates how territorial issues are generally linked to voter identity with an ethnicity, language, or nationality, and how identitarian preferences can have strong emotional attachments.²³ As territorial issues

by definition involve a change in the sovereign status of a given territory, individuals (on both sides of the issue) are likely to have emotional drivers of such preferences. The politicization of identity and territorial issues is made possible due to such emotional attachments to the ethnic/national group, the sources of which are varied and have been extensively documented.²⁴ In short, the identity-oriented aspect that is often connected with territorial issues, linked to emotions, is likely to make individuals less willing to make territorial-policy trade-offs.²⁵

Second, territorial issues are more likely to be perceived as zero-sum than other first-dimension issues where forms of compromise are more politically feasible or realistic due to the possibility of division of the policy good. Advocates of territorial change (independence or reunification) can easily observe if the goal is obtained or being realistically discussed (and criticize any compromise); this also holds for advocates of the territorial status quo. Moreover, self-determination claims are particularly prone to be perceived as indivisible as they are associated with notions of homeland.²⁶ Thus, the symbolism of territorial changes and indivisibility of sovereignty claims are likely to prevent support for policy concessions.²⁷ Critically, territorial policies (for example, changing the borders of a country) are more consequential than other policies (for example, health or education policies) because the preferred outcomes are extremely costly to be reversed (unlike most other policies), and are likely to be perceived as irreversible.

3. Case context

In light of the above, we expect voters to weight territorial issues more than others. To test our broad claim, we analyze three cases: Catalonia, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These are politically autonomous regions within west European

democratic states with some degree of devolution or decentralization where territorial issues have a long-standing basis. In all three cases, parties compete for governance at the substate level. Further, public support for a change in territorial borders (independence in Catalonia and Scotland, unification with Ireland in Northern Ireland) has become a salient issue in recent years, with marked increases in support within Catalonia and Scotland from around the second decade of this century, and more recent changes in public discourse since Brexit for Northern Ireland. In this section, we discuss the relevance of these regions for our study. We focus on recent events and evidence that indicates the salience and relevance of territorial issues in political competition, as well as non-territorial issues.

Catalonia

After the Spanish transition to democracy in 1978, national minorities regained partial self-rule in a decentralized system that fell short of full federalism.²⁸ The process of decentralization was uneven, and this differential level of fiscal autonomy and a broader desire for increased political autonomy have caused tensions between the Catalonia regional and central governments.²⁹ While there had long been a small pro-independence minority, its support increased from 2010. A negotiated change to the Catalan regional constitution approved by the Catalan and national governments was strongly modified by the Spanish Constitutional Court, significantly reducing the region's autonomy. Support for independence increased from around 20 percent in 2010 to around 45-50 percent in 2012.³⁰ In 2015, a coalition of political parties labeled Junts pel Sí (Together for Yes) unified around the single issue of independence and won a majority of the seats in the Catalan Parliament,³¹ and planned a unilateral referendum on independence. The referendum was held on 1

October 2017, amid a tense situation with national police using force to prevent voting. Claiming a mandate of support from the referendum result, the Catalan Parliament declared independence on 27 October (although with no operational effects), and, as a result, the Spanish Senate unprecedentedly suspended the autonomy of Catalonia, imposing direct control over the region. Centrally-mandated elections in December 2017 were once again won by a pro-independence party coalition. Nationally, following two general elections in 2019, the formation of the left-wing coalition government received the support of the Catalan left-wing pro-independence party ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia), which backed the government in exchange for political dialogue over the territorial conflict in Catalonia.

This brief encapsulation indicates the extreme salience and relevance of territorial preferences in terms of political competition. Recent trends and descriptive data from the region also illustrate the relevance of counter-independence as a mobilization tactic, as well as that of other issues on political competition. Regarding the former, anti-independence parties such as Citizens (Cs) increased their popularity during the 2012-2017 period, winning a plurality of votes in the 2017 regional election, on a platform defending the existing union. Vox, a new far-right party, greatly increased its popularity in Spain in 2018 with double-digit national support and as well as within Catalonia in the February 2021 regional elections, also strongly emphasizing anti-Catalan independence, Spanish nationalism, and opposition to further regional autonomy.

Regarding the relevance of non-territorial issues, there has been strong disagreement within both the pro-independence parties' bloc and the set of parties opposed to independence, such as over traditional left-right state intervention and redistribution policies, as well as immigration.³² For example, within the pro-

independence bloc, the moderate (ERC) and far-left parties are more pro-social spending and redistribution than JxC (Together for Catalonia). In the anti-independence bloc, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) is more pro-social spending and redistribution than the right-wing People's Party (PP), Cs or VOX.

Scotland

The goal of and prospects for Scottish independence were not widely present for most of Scotland's post-war history. The key change came in 1997, when a devolution referendum led to the transfer of powers to the Scottish Parliament.³³ Prior to devolution, Scottish Labour had dominated the government in Scotland, but subsequently the Scottish National Party (SNP) increased its support, moving from a minority government in the Scottish subnational elections of 2007 to a majority government in the elections of 2011. The party campaigned strongly for independence and used their increased vote share as a mandate for an independence referendum. In September 2014, a UK government-approved referendum on independence was held. The option for independence failed, but with a closer vote than expected (55.3% to 44.7%) and with the highest turnout of any UK election. Since the 2014 referendum, as well as the Brexit referendum of June 2016, support for Scottish independence has grown and polls now indicate around 50 percent support.³⁴ Such support has been increasingly aligned with Scottish identity; in 2012, only half of those who felt Scottish supported independence, while by 2016, this had increased to two-thirds.³⁵ The SNP has also increasingly gained its support from pro-Scottish independence individuals.³⁶ A recent estimate is that around 85 percent of those who supported independence voted for the SNP.³⁷ As of this writing, the SNP leadership introduced a

draft bill for a second independence referendum but it was found outside its devolved powers by the UK Supreme Court.

As in the Catalan case, political competition over non-territorial issues persists. Other parties compete on the territorial issue, where both major non-SNP parties (Scottish Labour and Conservatives) oppose another referendum, but the Conservative opposition has been more strident.³⁸ Electorally, the SNP's increasing support has come at the expense of Scottish Labour Party, which has attempted to emphasize non-territorial issues, such as positioning itself further to the left on redistribution and opposing austerity. In addition, Brexit has recently exacerbated divisions, with the SNP taking a stronger position against Brexit.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the territorial debate is different due to the historical sectarian polarization, though political competition over non-territorial issues is also present. Identity has been and remains the dominating factor in conditioning territorial preferences, with the divide between those who want to remain a part of the United Kingdom (termed unionists or loyalists, who are primarily though not exclusively from a Protestant background) and those who want to unite with the Republic of Ireland (nationalists or republicans, primarily Catholic). The long-term segregation and division in the region were exacerbated by the 30-year conflict over the constitutional status of the area, resulting in over 3,000 deaths.³⁹ The conflict ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), which formalized control between the two communities through a power-sharing devolved government where either faction can veto controversial legislation. Following devolution, politics polarized into the

two more extreme political parties: Sinn Féin as the largest nationalist party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) as the largest unionist party.⁴⁰

Support for unification with Ireland has traditionally been low, ranging between 22-30% support in the twenty years after the GFA. But since the Brexit referendum and the UK-EU trade agreement in place at the time of writing, which has resulted in economic friction between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, the prospect of an Irish unification referendum, provided for in the GFA, has become more popular and salient.⁴¹ At the time of our survey, 68% of nationalists supported a united Ireland (with the biggest change coming from “conditional Catholic nationalists” who have moved from uncommitted to supportive of Irish unification,⁴² whereas only 1% of unionists supported such an arrangement).⁴³

In the years following the GFA, there was little evidence of inter-bloc competition on other policy issues,⁴⁴ as the consociational arrangements mean that parties did not need to distinguish themselves on other policies. However, the parties increasingly include other issues in their campaigning along a liberal-conservative divide, and there is a growing proportion of voters who care about non-territorial issue.⁴⁵ The non-sectarian liberal party (Alliance) has gained success on a platform broadly endorsing diversity, for example with a more pro-immigration view.⁴⁶ The Brexit issue and corresponding border issues naturally made salient the powers of the EU.⁴⁷

Overall, these cases are critical regions where territoriality remains a salient and contested political issue, and where identity considerations naturally matter. But they also illustrate the relevance of a variety of other issues that parties compete on.

4. Research Design

Our core expectation is that territorial issues are likely to weigh more than other issues. We test these with a conjoint survey in which individuals assess different pairs of candidates holding different issue positions and then choose which candidate they prefer. We first expect that individuals who have congruence with political candidates on territorial issues will be more favorable towards such candidates than towards those with whom they do not have such congruence. Second, and crucially, we expect that territorial congruence will weigh more than congruence on other issues.

We designed three regionally representative surveys in Scotland, Catalonia, and Northern Ireland, fielded in September 2019.⁴⁸ The online surveys were administered by the firm Respondi Ltd with a sample of 1,650 in Scotland, 1,683 in Catalonia, and 796 in NI (stratified by gender and age categories, plus religious background in NI).⁴⁹ We use a fully randomized conjoint design where individuals evaluate five pairs of candidates with randomly chosen issue positions.

Conjoint designs are most appropriate for assessing whether a specific feature of a package (in our case a candidate platform) affects support of that political candidate.⁵⁰ Such designs permit efficient isolation of which issue positions matter most for individuals. Further, they allow the respondent to mask the reasons for their choice selection, so we can elicit responses that could be perceived to be potentially socially undesirable and thus difficult to assess with other designs (some respondents may not reveal preferences to survey interviewers or may even not acknowledge them to themselves). Finally, the forced choice and randomized issue positions allow for clearer causal assessment of the relevance of candidate issue positions (and corresponding voter preferences) than previous designs.⁵¹

In the design, we ask respondents to choose among hypothetical pairs of candidates, randomizing the contents of their positions. Respondents evaluate two candidates who are standing for election for an unspecified political office at the regional level.⁵² The candidates vary by the policy positions they endorse, with respect to the following dimensions: *territorial change*, *expansion of EU power*, *environmental regulation*, *control of immigration*, and *public welfare spending*.⁵³ We chose the final four issues, which do not directly address the territorial issue, as they are salient political issues in all three regions at the time of the survey, are frequently asked in other European surveys, and indicate division in polling.⁵⁴ For example, in Scotland, a public opinion poll in 2019 put the first priority for the government as helping the economy grow, followed by social spending items such as improving health, education, housing and inequality, followed by environmental concerns.⁵⁵

Within each of the three regions, individuals were asked to assess five pairs of hypothetical candidates. As an example, the preamble for the Scotland conjoint study was the following: “Imagine tomorrow you have to vote for an important political office in Scotland. Suppose you have to choose between two candidates, neither of whom is affiliated with any existing political party. Below you will read some basic information about them and what policies they support. For whom would you vote? We realize of course that you may want more information, but please do your best to choose one of them. Please read the information about each candidate carefully.” Each candidate took one of three simple positions on each issue or attribute (generally “increase,” “decrease,” or “keep the status quo”). For the case of territory, the three candidate positions were “supports Catalan independence /Scottish independence /united Ireland”, “is against [territory-specific change]”, and a third position of “does not have a clear position.” This latter option is inserted to test the effect of a credible

intermediate territorial position relative to either the “territorial status quo” or “change borders” position.⁵⁶ To summarize, in simultaneously fielded surveys in Catalonia, Scotland and Northern Ireland, each candidate had five policy different dimensions, each of which could take three possible values. The goal was to keep the profiles easy to understand for the respondent, straightforward to read, and to maximize respondent attention.⁵⁷ Table I presents the summary of the policy dimensions and values, and Figure A1 in the Supporting Information gives a screenshot of a sample candidate pairing.⁵⁸

For each pair, the respondent was asked which of the candidates they would prefer. They were then asked to rank each candidate from one to seven.⁵⁹ Importantly, later in the survey we measure the actual respondent preferences on the same five issues so we can estimate conditional marginal effects based on the respondent’s own policy preferences.⁶⁰ We also measure a battery of demographic variables that are similarly coded across all three regions.⁶¹

Table I: Conjoint Experiment Dimensions and Attributes

Dimension	Attributes
Gender	Mr / Ms [random 2-letter initials]
Age	24, 35, 45, 55, 65
Powers to EU	Increase, Decrease, Status Quo (regarding EU power)
Immigration	Increase, Decrease, Status Quo
Environmental regulations	Increase, Decrease, Status Quo
Social spending	Increase, Decrease, Status Quo
Territorial status	Independence (United Ireland), Against independence (United Ireland), Does not have a clear stance

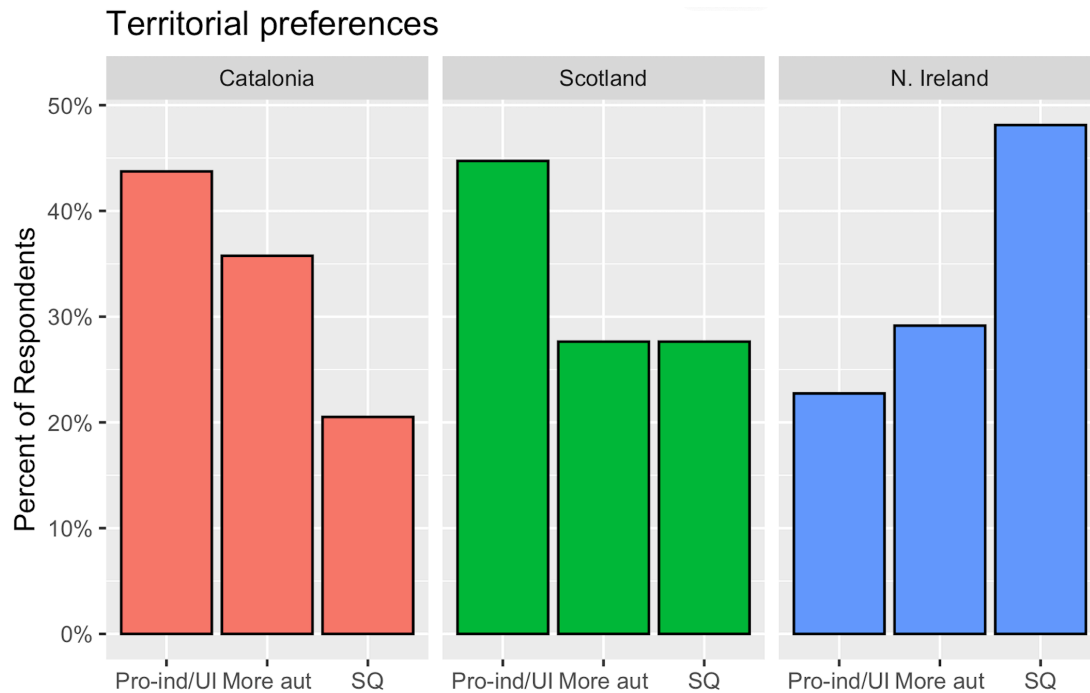
We estimate a standard linear probability model where the dependent variable is the choice of a particular candidate from the pairwise evaluation. All issue positions that could be taken are essentially randomly assigned binary variables with the “status quo” option as the baseline (for the territorial issue, we use the “ambiguity” position as the baseline).⁶² This method allows for easy identification of how much each candidate position (each value on the policy dimension) matters for candidate appeal and by how much relative to other positions. All specifications control for the respondent’s age, gender, education level, and income. We estimate the simple average marginal component effect (AMCE) with standard errors clustered by respondent.⁶³ We also estimate marginal means, which are particularly helpful in subgroup analyses.⁶⁴

5. Results

Before presenting the results of the conjoint experiment, we briefly summarize the issue preferences in our survey. Figure 1 shows territorial preferences for the three regions, where 44% prefer independence in Catalonia and 45% in Scotland. In Northern Ireland, the most preferred category is to remain in the UK, with 48%. In the three regions, around one third of respondents are “territorial moderates”; they thus are a non-negligible minority. Figures of the preferences for the other issues (welfare state spending, control of immigration, environmental regulations, degree of EU power) are included in the Supporting Information (Figures B4-B7).⁶⁵ Across the three regions, over half of respondents are in favor of increased social spending. The preferences for the other issues are more mixed, although three quarters of the Catalan sample supports increased environmental regulations. Unsurprisingly, EU power is a

key issue in Scotland and Northern Ireland (around 40% of respondents want less powers to the EU; this percentage is significantly smaller, 25%, in Catalonia).

Figure 1: Territorial preferences in each region



Conjoint results: conditional results with policy preferences

To test our hypotheses, we estimate the effect of voter-candidate issue congruence on individual candidate choice across all five issues.⁶⁶ To do so, we estimate an OLS model controlling for the respondent’s own issue positions on all five issues and include interaction terms of each candidate position with the respondent’s own issue preference.⁶⁷ We then display the predicted probability of candidate choice conditional on the individual’s own individual position. In this way, we can first assess how individuals with territorial preferences at the “poles” reward or punish candidates who are congruent or incongruent on the territorial issue. We can then make these comparisons across all types of respondents and candidate issue

positions to examine whether the congruence reward is greater for the territorial issue compared to other issues. Figures 2-4 show the predicted probabilities for the three regions; outcomes around the 0.5 position indicate that the respondent is essentially indifferent between the candidates.⁶⁸ For each region, we plot the five issues with the predicted probability of candidate choice for each combination of candidate position (on the Y axis) and respondent I policy preference (respondent's policy positions are distinguished by different colors and shapes). The X-axis denotes the probability of the respondent choosing a candidate, given the respondent's own policy preference and candidate position on the given issue.

Figure 2: Conjoint conditional results by policy preference, Catalonia

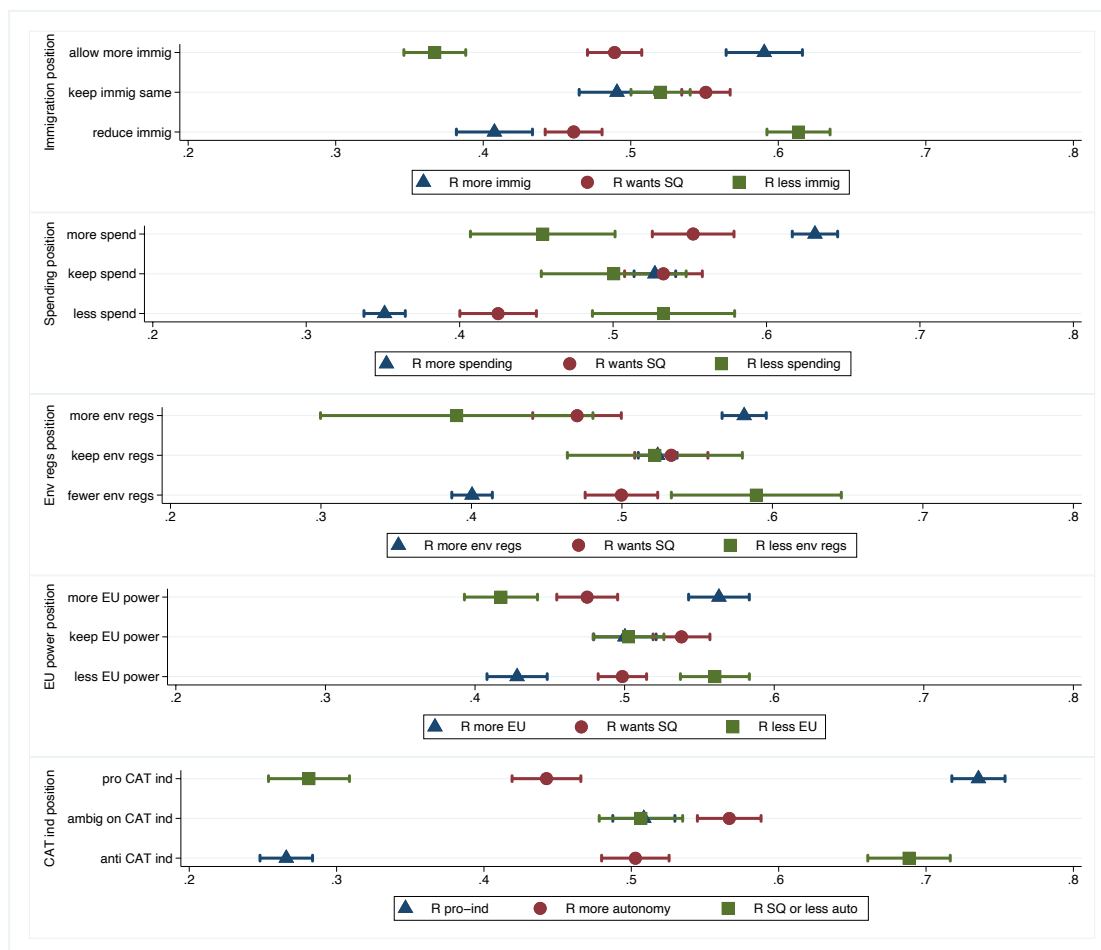
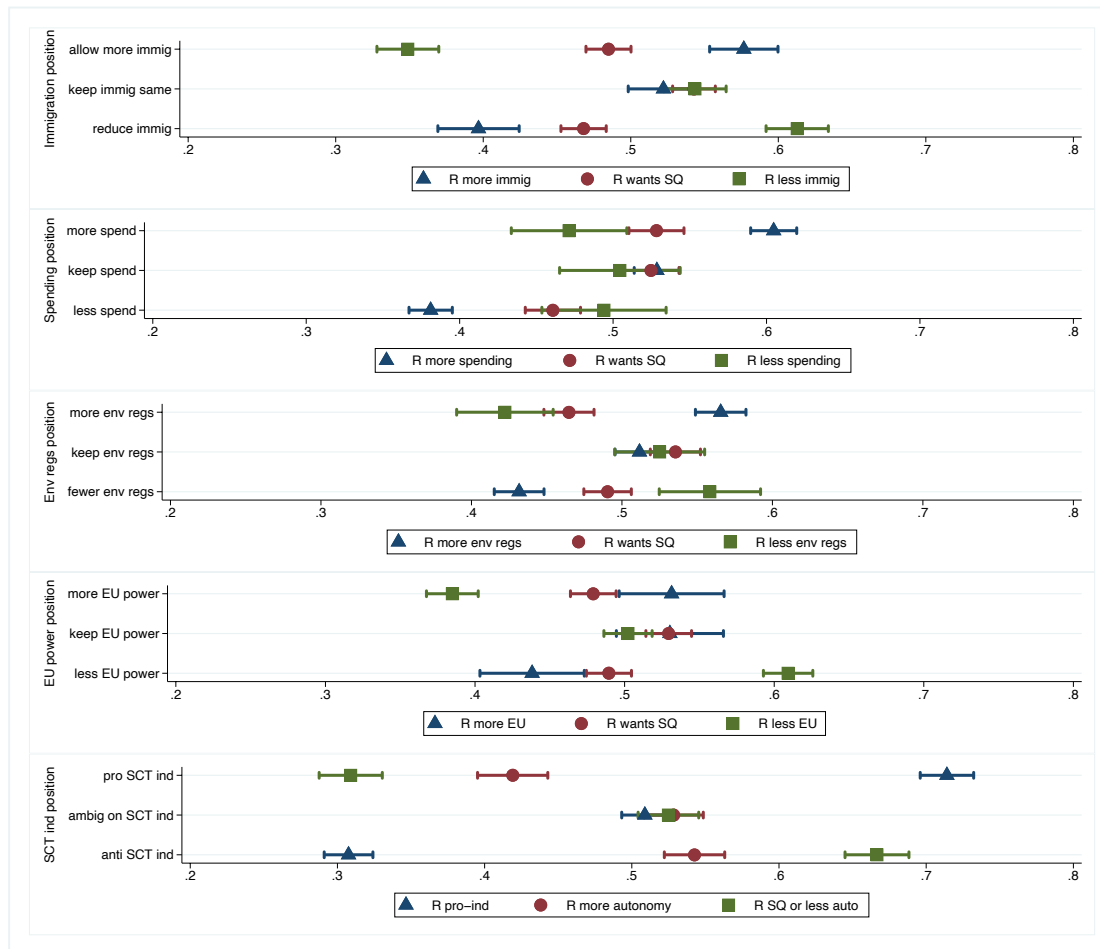


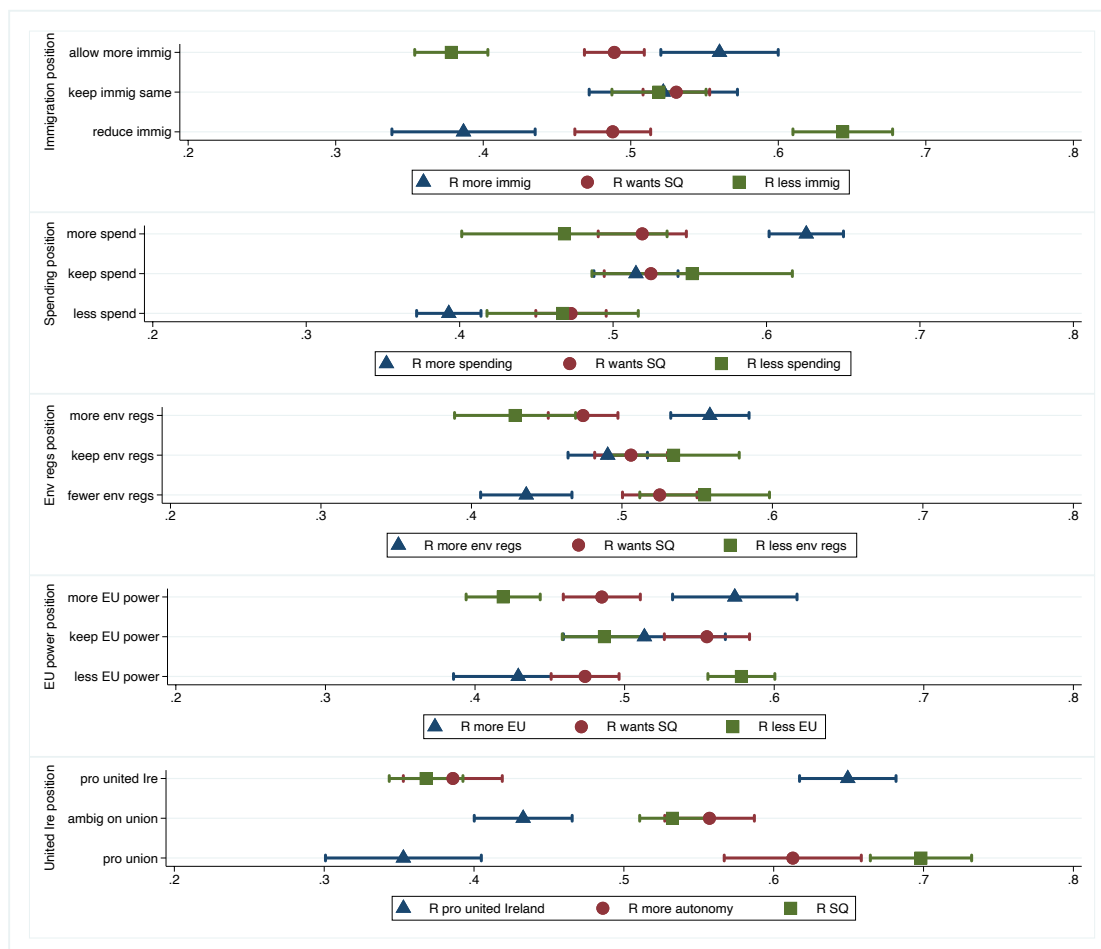
Figure 3: Conjoint conditional results by policy preference, Scotland



Across all three regions, we see that voters reward congruence on the territorial issue and punish incongruence (seen in the bottom graph in each figure). The overall pattern from the figures shows the larger weight placed on the territorial issue relative to other issues. Both the “pro-independence/united Ireland” and “pro-status quo” voters substantially reward and punish like-minded and opposing candidates, respectively.⁶⁹ For example, in Catalonia, the probability of pro-independence individuals to choose pro-status quo candidates is about 0.27, while their probability of choosing a pro-independence candidate is 0.74. In Scotland, the corresponding candidate choice probabilities are about 0.31 and 0.71, respectively, while in NI, the probabilities are about 0.35 and 0.65, respectively. We note that in

both Catalonia and Scotland, pro-independence individuals reward pro-independence candidates slightly more so than pro-status quo individuals reward pro-status quo candidates (the difference in both regions is about 0.05), while in Northern Ireland pro-status quo respondents supporting pro-status quo candidates reward more strongly (though pro-united Ireland respondents punish more). In general, pro-independence individuals exhibit the greatest degree of candidate electoral reward and punishment, and pro-status quo on territory individuals are the next largest category.⁷⁰

Figure 4: Conjoint conditional results by policy preference, Northern Ireland



We also find that individuals who are pro-autonomy tend to “punish” pro-independence/united Ireland and reward the intermediate territorial stance candidates. However, the degree to which pro-autonomy individuals reward or punish the

ambiguous candidates is far less than the gains that pro-independence candidates receive from like-minded voters. One implication of these findings is that in territories where the issue is salient and thus there are relatively more people at the poles than in middle positions, there could be less electoral benefit for a candidate by taking an intermediate stance. This could in turn further policy-based polarization over this issue, as candidates have less electoral incentives to take ambiguous or intermediate territorial positions.⁷¹

The accompanying question is whether congruence matters *more* for territorial issues than other policy issues, as per our expectation. The results show that the degree of reward and punishment on the territorial issue is greater than that of the four other issues. This conclusion can be seen from comparison of the point estimates of the “R pro-independence” and “R pro-status quo” dots in the bottom panel of each figure, versus the comparable positions (“R more [issue]” and “R less [issue]”) on all other panels. For the four other policy issues, the magnitude of voter-candidate (in)congruence is much smaller than that of the territorial issue. This is most easily observed in the closer “clustering” of the predicted probabilities for the other issues, which indicate smaller differences in the probability of favoring a candidate based on voter-candidate issue agreement.

To what extent do pro-status quo or maximum territorial-change respondents prioritize the candidate’s territorial position over that on other issues? We look into such trade-offs by examining voter prioritization when there is a conflict between congruence (incongruence) on territory and incongruence (congruence) on another favored issue. For space and simplicity, we focus on territorial and social spending preferences, since spending was favored in the average results and is indicative of a left-right cleavage. We examine the predicted probabilities of selecting a candidate by

subgroups of respondent characteristics from the AMCE models. We first show the results for a respondent who is pro-independence/united Ireland and pro-spending (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Predicted probability of candidate selection by pro-independence/united Ireland and pro-spending respondent, Catalonia, Scotland, and Northern Ireland

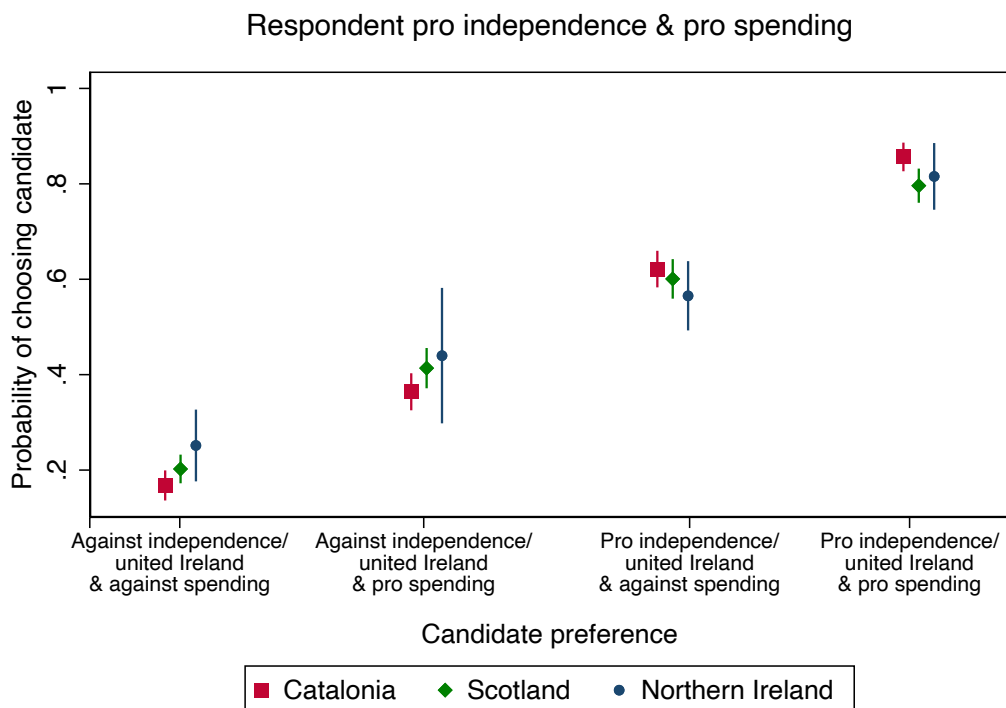
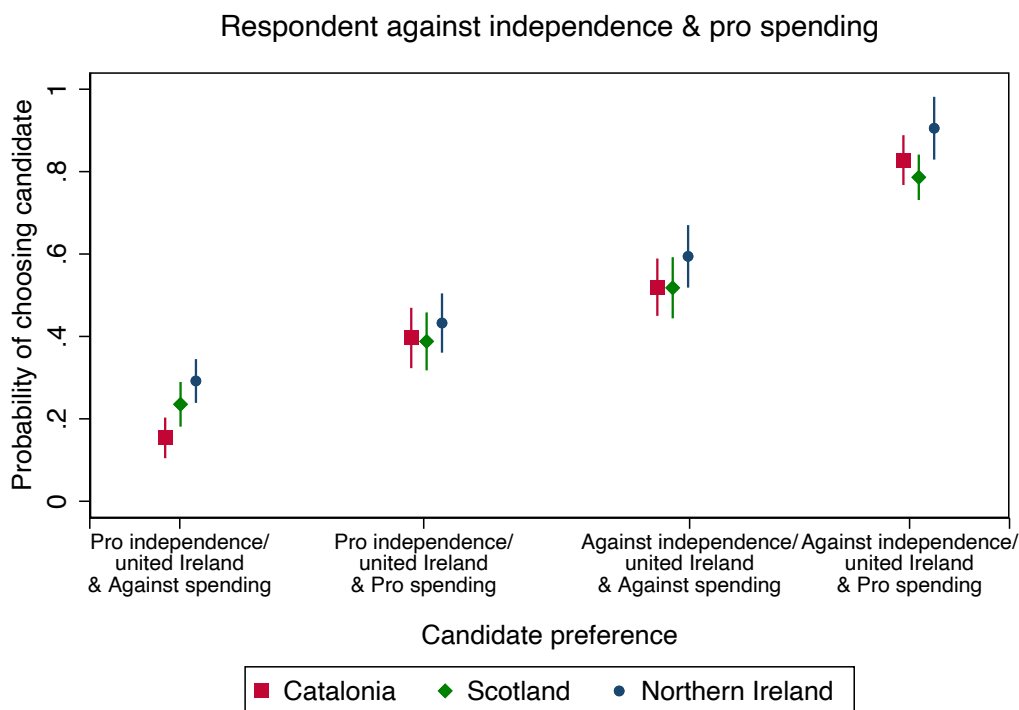


Figure 5 depicts the predicted probabilities of choosing a candidate for a pro-independence and pro-spending voter. In all three territories, the individual is most likely to choose a candidate who is pro-independence and spending, not surprisingly, and least likely to choose a candidate who is against independence and spending. But, what happens when the candidate is not congruent on one of these two issues? We observe that the voter is substantially more likely to vote for a pro-independence candidate that is against spending (column 3) than for a pro-spending candidate who

is against independence (column 2), strongly and significantly in Catalonia and Scotland. Note that, for this voter, a candidate who opposes independence (but agrees on spending) is around the 0.4 mark, but a candidate who has the opposite positions is around the 0.6 mark. This is an indicator that the voter is less willing to trade-off the territorial issue.⁷² The difference is less strong and is not significant in Northern Ireland.⁷³

In Figure 6, we examine the results for respondents who are anti-independence/united Ireland and pro-spending, to examine whether the direction of preference within the territorial issue has different effects.

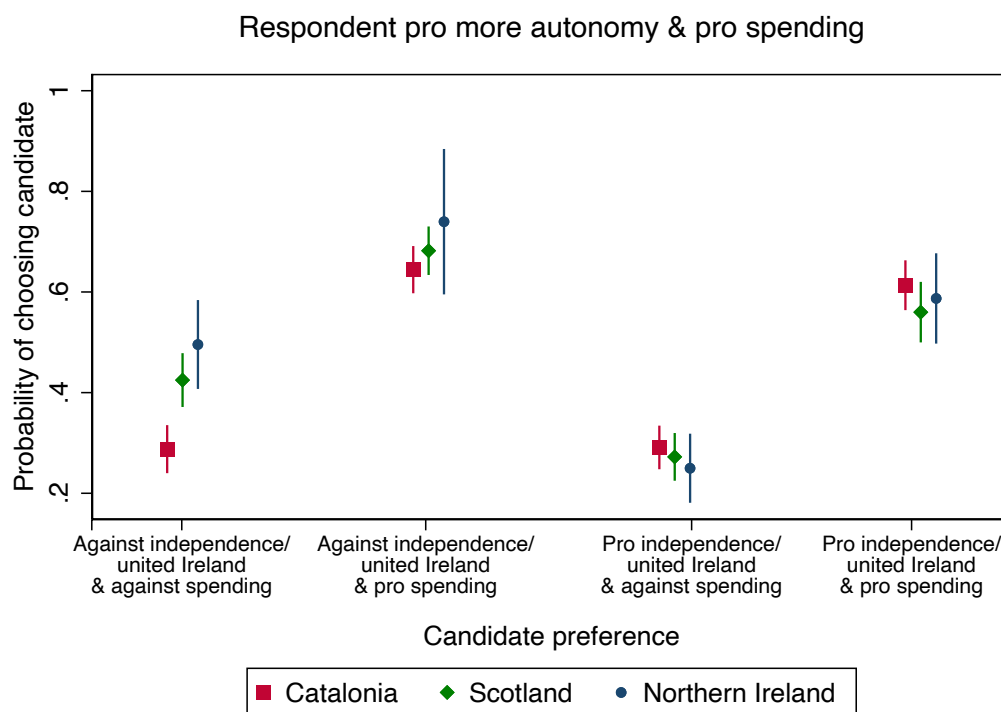
Figure 6: Predicted probability of candidate selection by anti-independence/united Ireland and pro-spending respondent, Catalonia, Scotland, and Northern Ireland



In Figure 6, as previously, the key comparison is of column 2 and 3. As with pro-independence and pro-spending respondents, we find again for this group that congruence on territorial preference makes a candidate more preferred. The effect is a little less strong for Catalonia and Scotland, compared to the pro-independence respondents (from Figure 5). In Northern Ireland, the effect is more impactful compared to the pro-united Ireland respondents (see, again, Figure 5). Pro-independence respondents value the territorial stance of candidates more in Catalonia and Scotland, whereas in Northern Ireland, it is the anti-united Ireland respondents who place more weight on the territorial stance of the candidate.

For completeness, we also examine the preferences of respondents who support an intermediate option of the region remaining in Spain or the UK, but with increased regional autonomy. The results are depicted in Figure 7. For these respondents, congruence with the candidates on spending is most important, with both pro-spending candidates (columns 2 and 4) more strongly favored than the anti-spending candidates (columns 1 and 3) in Catalonia and Scotland, and more than column 3 in Northern Ireland. Turning to territorial preferences, we can interpret all the candidates as incongruent with the respondent since neither pro-independence nor anti-independence are congruent with pro-more autonomy. Comparing the anti-independence candidates (columns 1 and 2) with the pro-independence candidates (columns 3 and 4), we see that the anti-independence candidate is slightly favored within each category of spending preference, and somewhat more so in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Thus, pro-more autonomy voters are more influenced by the spending issue, but when evaluating candidates who are incongruent on territorial preferences, such respondents seem to favor anti-independence over pro-independence candidates.⁷⁴

Figure 7: Predicted probability of candidate selection by pro-autonomy and pro-spending respondent, Catalonia, Scotland and Northern Ireland



In summary, properly conditioning on respondents' own preferences, the results of the conjoint experiment indicate that they are sensibly more likely to support congruent candidates and reject incongruent candidates on all issues, but do so most strongly on the territorial issue. Notably, we find that when respondents are forced to choose between two favored issue positions (i.e., territory and spending), those respondents who take a territorial stance either for or against independence are less willing to trade-off candidate choice on the territorial issue. By contrast, and consistent with our results in Figures 2-4 above, respondents with an intermediate preference on the territorial issue prioritize the social spending issue more so than the territorial one. Although this could be because neither candidate is fully congruent on their territorial preferences, these results are consistent with previous research

showing that individuals in Catalonia with intermediate territorial preferences (i.e., anti-independence but pro-increased autonomy within Spain) present overall less polarized views on this issue).⁷⁵

6. Conclusion

The status of substate territories is a contested issue in many countries with some territorial devolution of power, and political candidates often must take a position on this topic. However, regional candidates and parties compete along many issues and must bundle their positions along with the territorial one; it is not obvious what citizens do in this situation in terms of considering the relevance of territoriality. Territorial issues are often deemed to be dominating the political debates in such regions, and to benefit those candidates and platforms that raise them. But whether voters do value these issues more than others when deciding who to vote for has remained untested. In other words, while we know that a significant portion of voters of these territories care about territorial disputes (in one direction or another), we know less about how they make trade-offs between territorial and other issues such as social spending, immigration, or environmental regulations.

In this article, we propose straightforward hypotheses of why territorial issues might be more heavily weighted, which we test with novel comparative evidence from three European regions where such issues are salient (Catalonia, Scotland, and Northern Ireland). To the best of our knowledge, this article is the first to clearly measure the trade-off between territorial preferences and other policy issues across these regions. We find evidence that individuals with territorial preferences at the poles (i.e., those much in favor of territorial change or those much in favor of the territorial status quo) tend to reward congruent candidates on this issue the most and

punish opposing candidates the most. We also find that these individuals are less willing to trade-off on the territorial issue than on other issues. This is not to say that they do not care about other policies (such voters can come from across the traditional left-right divide), but the territorial issue is the one that ends up weighing the most when selecting a candidate/platform.

Our theoretical arguments and corresponding design deliberately focus on sub-state contexts where the territoriality issue is *already* salient—we expect territoriality to matter more because of its unique emotional-identitarian activation and the perceived irreversibility of the policy platform. This deliberate scope condition means that future research might address the weight of such preferences when such conditions are relaxed, such as contexts where sub-state identity issues are somewhat salient but the territorial dimension (i.e., secession) is less so.

We wish to be circumspect in that our baseline arguments and design are deliberately intended not to test *when* politicians make this issue salient, as our design conditions on this salience (as well as that of other issues). We flag that a host of other region-specific factors, such as shocks to political competence or the international context, can explain such salience. Our results suggest though that since the electoral rewards for voter-congruence on this issue are generally higher than on others, we might expect sub-state politicians to be more likely to make territorial issues salient in the future—in our data, candidates who take an intermediate position are not rewarded as much on this issue as those taking positions at either end. However, these electoral rewards could change with the salience of the territorial issue, which could lead to changes in the distribution of moderates in a given society.

Our results have several implications and suggest avenues for future research. First, we view these joint conditions of identitarian mobilization and the zero-sum

nature of such issues as likely necessary but not sufficient conditions for the phenomenon identified here. But we suggest that sensibly, if the territorial issue gains in prominence and importance, there can be a dynamic where pro-status quo candidates find electoral gain from also invoking the issue, and individuals will place greater weight on it for the aforementioned reasons.

Second, one direction for future research is examining how the characteristics of a given election, whether it is local or national, for example, might affect voters' elasticity on the territorial issue, particularly because of the different consequentiality of national versus local elections.

Third, one aspect of the territorial debate that often generates division is the particular territorial strategy pursued, such as whether to press for a referendum, declare unilateral independence, or to continue negotiations.⁷⁶ Supporters of border change might disagree about how to reach that goal. A similar study with candidates espousing different tactics would be a promising avenue for research.

Finally, in this manuscript, we have examined regions where territorial issues have recently become salient in western Europe. It would be useful to investigate a broader universe of cases, including ones such as India, Indonesia or Turkey, where self-determination issues are also salient and long-standing, to see whether the findings hold under a wider range of conditions.

NOTES

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² Authors are listed in alphabetical order and contributed equally.

³ Few studies jointly consider these distinct classes of issues. Galais and Serrano document a strong correlation between sub-state identity and left-wing placement. See Carol Galais and Ivan Serrano. “The Effects of Regional Attachment on Ideological Self-Placement: A Comparative Approach,” *Comparative European Politics* 18, no. 4 (2020), 487-509. For an institutional approach on the rise in regionalism, see Dawn Brancati, “The Origins and Strengths of Regional Parties,” *British Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 2 (2007), 135-159.

⁴ Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham and Katherine Sawyer. “Is Self-Determination Contagious? A Spatial Analysis of the Spread of Self-Determination Claims,” *International Organization* 71, no. 3 (2017), 585-604.

⁵ See Jason Sorens. *Secessionism: Identity, Interest, and Strategy* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012); Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham. *Inside the Politics of Self-determination* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Ryan D. Griffiths. *Secession and the Sovereignty Game* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021)

⁶ See, for example, Robert Liñeira and Ailsa Henderson. “Risk Attitudes and Independence Vote Choice,” *Political Behavior* 43, no. 2 (2021), 541-560; Maria Jose Hierro and Didac Queralt. “The Divide over Independence: Explaining Preferences for Secession in an Advanced Open Economy,” *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (2021), 422-442.

⁷ John E. Roemer. “Why the Poor do not Expropriate the Rich: an Old Argument in New Garb,” *Journal of Public Economics* 70, no. 3 (1998), 399-424.

⁸ We refer to issues, but our discussion and empirical assessment could be about different “cleavages” (i.e., left-right vs. center-periphery) too.

⁹ Jens Hainmueller, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto. “Causal Inference in Conjoint Analysis: Understanding Multidimensional Choices via Stated Preference Experiments,” *Political Analysis* 22, no. 1 (2014), 1-30.

¹⁰ See Michael Keating. *Nations against the state: The new politics of nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996); Montserrat Guibernau. “Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy,” *Ethnopolitics* 12, no. 4 (2013), 368-393.

¹¹ Michael Hechter. *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2000). In the past years, the longstanding nationalist goal of unification with Ireland is increasingly discussed in NI due to the impact of Brexit. See Lesley-Ann Daniels and Alexander Kuo. “Brexit and Territorial Preferences: Evidence from Scotland and Northern Ireland,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 51, no. 2 (2021), 186-211.

¹² Brendan O’Leary. *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume III: Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹³ Our design is not intended to test theories of *when* territorial issues are made politically salient. We take as given the salience of these issues and provide evidence on the magnitude of their relevance for vote choice at the individual level.

¹⁴ William H. Riker. *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ Once territorial issues are made salient by one candidate, other candidates can choose whether to make salient the opposing territorial position (such as preserving the status quo), or endorse a more extreme territorial change position. Competing parties or candidates can choose to make other issues salient, such as arguing that territoriality distracts from “real” issues. See Cathy Gormley-Heenan and Roger Mac Ginty. “Ethnic Outbidding and Party Modernization: Understanding the Democratic Unionist Party’s Electoral Success in the Post-Agreement Environment,” *Ethnopolitics* 7, no. 1 (2008), 43-61; Astrid Barrio and Juan Rodriguez-Teruel. “Reducing the Gap between Leaders and Voters? Elite Polarization, Outbidding Competition, and the Rise of Secessionism in Catalonia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 10 (2017), 1776-1794. Marc Sanjaume-Calvet and Elvira Riera-Gil. “Languages, Secessionism and Party Competition in Catalonia: A case of De-Ethnicising Outbidding?” *Party Politics* 28, no. 1 (2022), 85-104.

¹⁶ Laia Balcells and Alexander Kuo. “Preferences in Between: Moderates in the Catalan Secessionist Conflict,” *Politics and Governance* 9, no. 4 (2021), 386-398.

¹⁷ For Catalonia, see Ivan Serrano. “Just a Matter of Identity? Support for Independence in Catalonia,” *Regional & Federal Studies* 23, no. 5 (2013), 523-545; Hierro and Queralt. For Scotland, see Robert Liñeira and Daniel Cetrà. “The Independence Case in Comparative Perspective,” *The*

Political Quarterly 86, no. 2 (2015), 257-264; Liñeira and Henderson. For Northern Ireland, see Claire Mitchell. *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland: Boundaries of Belonging and Belief* (Routledge, 2006); Ross Bond and Michael Rosie. "National Identities and Attitudes to Constitutional Change in Post-Devolution UK: A Four Territories Comparison," *Regional & Federal Studies* 20, no. 1 (2010), 83-105.

¹⁸ Causality remains difficult to establish, as substate identity could either drive such preferences or be further activated due to such preferences. See Marc Guinjoan. "Who Backs Separation? An Empirical Assessment of the Objective and Subjective Markers of Identity in Support for Secession in Catalonia," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* (2021). Moreover, both identity and preferences could be jointly activated by some other factor. See María José Hierro and Aina Gallego. "Identities in Between: Political Conflict and Ethnonational Identities in Multicultural States," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 6 (2018), 1314-1339.

¹⁹ Guillem Rico and Robert Liñeira. "Bringing Secessionism into the Mainstream: The 2012 Regional Election in Catalonia," *South European Society and Politics* 19, no. 2 (2014), 257-280. Liñeira, et al. find in Catalonia that informing individuals of candidate's territorial positions affects perceptions of their left-right position, although they do not focus on candidate preference. Robert Liñeira, Jordi Muñoz, and Guillem Rico. "Inferring party positions across issue dimensions" *Party Politics* 27, no. 5 (2021), 1031-1043.

²⁰ José Fernández-Albertos. "Votar en Dos Dimensiones: el Precio del Nacionalismo y la Ideología en el Comportamiento Electoral Vasco, 1993-2001," *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* (2002), 153-181; Laia Balcells. "¿Es el Voto Nacionalista un Voto de Proximidad o un Voto de Compensación? Una Nueva Aproximación "Espacial" al Voto en Dos Dimensiones," *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* (2007), 61-88; Gonzalo Rivero. "Heterogeneous Preferences in Multidimensional Spatial Voting Models: Ideology and Nationalism in Spain," *Electoral Studies* 40 (2015), 136-145; Stephen Ansolabehere and M. Socorro Puy. "Identity Voting," *Public Choice* 169, no. 1 (2016), 77-95. A limitation of such approaches is that one cannot precisely infer the relative weight of issue positions because it is unclear if the individual placement of parties on issues is accurate or whether it is itself affected by individual assessments of parties. A further shortcoming is that such designs do not permit precise comparison of voters' evaluations of different issues or platforms.

²¹ De la O and Rodden present evidence of religious preferences outweighing redistribution preferences for some poorer voters. Ana L De La O and Jonathan A Rodden. "Does Religion Distract the Poor? Income and Issue Voting Around the World," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4 (2008), 437-476. Tavits and Potter find that right-wing parties strategically aim to shift attention away from economics to other issues. Margit Tavits and Joshua D. Potter. "The Effect of Inequality and Social Identity on Party Strategies," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (2015), 744-758. Incumbent parties can also deflect attention from territorial issues. Sergi Pardos-Prado and Iñaki Sagarzazu. "Economic Performance and Center-Periphery Conflicts in Party Competition," *Party Politics* 25, no. 1 (2019), 50-62.

²² The original conception of Riker's idea of heresthetics proposed scenarios in which political entrepreneurs try to stake out new dimensions to upset the existing equilibrium of political competition (the activation of different dimensions can then shift preferences onto other ones). Riker.

²³ For example, Keith Darden and Anna Grzymala-Busse. "The great divide: Literacy, nationalism, and the communist collapse," *World Politics* 59, no. 1 (2006), 83-115; Sorens 2012; Peter John Loewen, Maxime Héroux-Legault, and Carolina de Miguel. "Nationalism and Ethnic Heterogeneity: The Importance of Local Context or Nationalist Party Vote Choice," *Electoral Studies* 39 (2015); 129-141; Serrano 2013; Guinjoan. 2021. Sambanis, Schulhofer-Wohl and Shayo emphasize ethnic parochialism, which they argue predisposes individuals to support and cooperate with organizations making claims on behalf of their ethnic group. Nicholas Sambanis, Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl, and Moses Shayo. "Parochialism as a central challenge in counterinsurgency," *Science* 336, no. 6083 (2012), 805-808.

²⁴ Identification may also be activated by intra- and inter-group interactions and group status. See Sambanis, Schulhofer-Wohl and Shayo. Longer term sources of such attachments are varied, including early socialization through family and school. See Jóhanna Kristín Birnir. *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Darden and Grzymala-Busse.

²⁵ For a discussion of how emotions, identity, and territory overlap, see Devorah Manekin, Guy Grossman, and Tamar Mitts. "Contested Ground: Disentangling Material and Symbolic Attachment to Disputed Territory," *Political Science Research and Methods* 7, no. 4 (2019), 679-697.

- ²⁶ Toft, M. D. *The geography of ethnic violence: Identity, interests, and the indivisibility of territory*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
- ²⁷ Put differently, territory is a clear example of an inelastic issue where compromise is considered too costly. See Elaine K. Denny and Barbara F. Walter. "Ethnicity and Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (2014), 199-212. These arguments apply when territorial issues have been made salient as a policy goal. We suggest that they are less applicable when such issues are less salient, such as when they are present but where changing borders is not posed as a plausible alternative (e.g. from our countries of study, the regions of Wales and Galicia).
- ²⁸ Pablo Beramendi. *The Political Geography of Inequality: Regions and Redistribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- ²⁹ For a description of the nationalist movement in Catalonia since 1700, see John Huxtable Elliott. *Scots and Catalans: Union and Disunion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).
- ³⁰ See Figure B1 in the Supporting Information. Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2022, <https://ceo.gencat.cat/ca/inici>
- ³¹ In 2014, the Catalan government held a self-determination "popular consultation," (unauthorized by the central government) with over 80 percent of participants supporting independence.
- ³² Different constituencies have historically advocated different economic discourses within the independentist message. See Donatella Della Porta and Martín Portos. "A Bourgeois Story? The Class Basis of Catalan Independentism," *Territory, Politics, Governance* 9, no. 3 (2021), 391-411.
- ³³ For further historical context see James Mitchell. "Reviving the Union State: the Devolution Debate in Scotland," *Politics Review* 5, no. 3 (1996), 16-18; Elliott.
- ³⁴ See Figure B2 in the Supporting Information.
- ³⁵ John Curtice. "From Indyref1 to Indyref2? The State of Nationalism in Scotland." *ScotCen Social Research* (2016).
- ³⁶ Curtice.; Edward Fieldhouse and Christopher Prosser. "The limits of partisan loyalty: How the Scottish independence referendum cost Labour." *Electoral Studies* 52 (2018), 11-25.
- ³⁷ Curtice.
- ³⁸ As one Scottish Labour politician said, "A lot of our voters who are fed up with the constitutional question and want it to go away looked to [the Conservatives]". See Stuart Bennett, David S. Moon, Nick Pearce, and Sophie Whiting. "Labouring under a Delusion? Scotland's National Questions and the Crisis of the Scottish Labour Party." *Territory, Politics, Governance* 9, no. 5 (2020), 656-674.
- ³⁹ For a thorough discussion, see O'Leary 2019 and Brendan O'Leary. *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume II: Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- ⁴⁰ Cathy Gormley-Heenan, and Roger MacGinty. At the time of our survey, both these parties held 27 seats (30%) each in the (then non-functioning) Northern Ireland Assembly.
- ⁴¹ See Figure B3 in the Supporting Information.
- ⁴² John Garry, Brendan O'Leary, Kevin McNicholl, and James Pow. "The Future of Northern Ireland: Border Anxieties and Support for Irish Reunification under Varieties of UKexit." *Regional Studies* 55, no. 9 (2021), 1517-1527.
- ⁴³ ARK Life and Times Survey, 2020. The situation has since become much more polarized. At the time of writing, 89% of nationalists supported a united Ireland, the highest figure since the GFA (<https://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/LORD-ASHCROFT-POLLS-Ulster-and-the-Union-1.pdf>, p. 13)
- ⁴⁴ James Tilley, John Garry, and Neil Matthews. "The Evolution of Party Policy and Cleavage Voting Under Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland". *Government and Opposition* (2019), 1-19.
- ⁴⁵ Northern Ireland voters increasingly do not identify with either religion and such voters are more socially liberal, for example, on abortion and gay rights. See Peter Shirlow and Jon Tonge. "University of Liverpool NI General Election Survey 2019" *University of Liverpool* (2021).
- ⁴⁶ Chris Gilligan, Paul Hainsworth, and Aidan McGarry. "Fractures, foreigners and fitting in: Exploring attitudes towards immigration and integration in 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland." *Ethnopolitics* 10, no. 2 (2011), 253-269.
- ⁴⁷ Daniels and Kuo.
- ⁴⁸ Human-subjects approval was granted before the implementation of the surveys by Georgetown University [STUDY00001076], Universitat Pompeu Fabra [CIREP 0089], and University of Oxford [(CUREC 1A) R64046/RE001].
- ⁴⁹ Each attribute has 3 levels and each respondent completes 5 paired choices, i.e., 10 outputs. Setting the alpha at 0.05, and taking the AMCE as 0.05, all regions achieve greater than 0.8 power, and this is retained in the conditional results for Catalonia and Scotland, while NI reaches 0.73 power in the

conditional results. See Julian Schuessler and Markus Freitag. “Power Analysis for Conjoint Experiments” (2020). OSF preprint at: <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/9yuhp/>

⁵⁰ Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014. Such designs have been used to measure which aspects of policy packages are supported (e.g., Bechtel, Hainmueller and Margalit regarding eurozone bailout packages) or which individual characteristics are preferred regarding prospective immigrants (Hainmueller and Hopkins). Michael Bechtel, Jens Hainmueller, and Yotam Margalit. “Policy Design and Domestic Support for International Bailouts.” *European Journal of Political Research* 56 (2017), 864-886. Jens Hainmueller and Daniel Hopkins, “The Hidden American Immigration Consensus: A Conjoint Analysis of Attitudes toward Immigrants.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (2015), 529-548.

⁵¹ Horiuchi, Smith and Yamamoto write that the conjoint design is the most appropriate tool “...to understand and identify the multidimensional policy preferences behind vote choices in representative democracies.” Yusaku Horiuchi, Daniel M. Smith, and Teppei Yamamoto. “Measuring Voters’ Multidimensional Policy Preferences with Conjoint Analysis: Application to Japan’s 2014 Election.” *Political Analysis* 26, no. 2 (2018), 191. See also Chris Hanretty, Benjamin E. Lauderdale, and Nick Vivyan. “A Choice-Based Measure of Issue Importance in the Electorate” *American Journal of Political Science* 64, no. 3 (2020): 519-535.

⁵² We prefer to focus on candidate positions, not parties, as partisan information can crowd out engagement with differing characteristics. See Patricia A. Kirkland and Alexander Coppock. Additionally, this procedure avoids subjective decisions as to which policy combinations would be unrealistic or inconsistent to the respondent.

⁵³ We also randomized candidate gender (female or male), age (25-65 in decade increments), and a random 2-letter initial combination for candidate name to personalize each candidate. The full text of the candidate positions is presented in the Supporting Information.

⁵⁴ In some cases, some of these issues are related to the center-periphery distribution of power. For example, someone who is in favor of independence can argue that sovereignty will allow the region to decide on immigration or environmental regulations. Yet, this does not imply a full overlap with the territorial cleavage. We thank one anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

⁵⁵ Scottish Social Attitudes poll conducted in 2019-2020, available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-2019-attitudes-government-political-engagement/>, accessed 31/10/2022. The patterns in Northern Ireland and Catalonia are broadly similar.

⁵⁶ See Supporting Information Part A.1 for wording of the candidate options. We include the “ambiguous” policy option in the territorial dimension set as the “intermediate” candidate position (which is the “status quo” position for the other policy issues) because in the regions we are studying, the candidate advocating the “status quo” is not uniformly plausibly interpreted as having a neutral position on the territorial issue. “Ambiguity” is a more realistic “intermediate” option on this issue than other territorial positions such as “more autonomy”, which would not be equivalent to a “neutral” position, or “reducing” autonomy which very few individuals across the regions support. In Catalonia, for example, political parties that are perceived as representing positions in between the “pro-status quo” and the “pro-independence” ones, such as En Comú Podem, tend to have ambiguous positions on the territorial issue and are viewed as posing an “in between” solution with such rhetoric. The same applies to Alliance in Northern Ireland.

⁵⁷ In robustness checks, we estimate the models with the three first set of pairs, and dropping the last two pairs. The point estimates on the coefficients do not change.

⁵⁸ A combination of profiles where both candidates took identical positions on all five policies was prohibited.

⁵⁹ We present the results with the candidate choice as the dependent variable. The results are very similar when we assess candidate ranking in Scotland and Catalonia. In NI, the effect size is similar but imprecisely estimated due to being under powered.

⁶⁰ The response options are the same, except regarding territorial preferences where we measure whether respondents support the territorial status quo, independence (or unification in NI), or greater autonomy.

⁶¹ As the demographic correlates of candidate choice in these regions are the foci of other research, we do not present the results here. The results displaying the coefficients for these variables are in tables in section D of SI.

⁶² We discuss how our results do not substantively differ regarding alternative baselines in the next section. See Thomas Leeper, Sara B. Hobolt, and James Tilley. "Measuring Subgroup Preferences in Conjoint Experiments." *Political Analysis* 28, no. 2 (2020), 207-221.

⁶³ Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto.

⁶⁴ Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley.

⁶⁵ These questions were asked after the conjoint experiment to avoid priming candidate choice in the experiment. Tables B1-B3 of the Supporting Information display the descriptive statistics for the three regional samples.

⁶⁶ We note the conjoint results averaged across all the respondents to show the impact of each issue on candidate choice taking into account the other issues (displayed in Figures C1-C3 in the Supporting Information). In all three regions, the issue that generates the largest impact is social spending, in particular the rejection of a candidate who would reduce spending and the reward or selection of a candidate who would increase spending. This result is consistent with the literature that stresses the primacy of the left-right cleavage in European politics. We do not display these results as they are not the theoretical focus of the paper; these average results obscure the heterogeneity of interest, which is whether voters reward candidates sharing their policy preferences, and punish candidates with different policy preferences.

⁶⁷ Recall that each respondent's issue preference can have three possible values. In Figures E1 and E2 of the Supporting Information we present results when we measure respondent territorial preferences in Catalonia and Scotland with a binary coding (support territorial change versus the other two positions).

⁶⁸ Following Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley we estimate an omnibus F-test, which indicates that the interaction terms of candidate position and respondent preference are jointly statistically significant. In the Supporting Information Part F, we display these results as well as the differences in candidate choice probabilities. These predicted probabilities are estimated with the baseline of the "intermediate" category regarding candidate and respondent positions.

⁶⁹ Table D3 of the Supporting Information presents the regression tables generating Figures 3, 4, and 5.

⁷⁰ Figures E1-E3 of the Supporting Information indicate that lumping "pro-autonomy" and "pro-status quo" respondents together obscures variation in candidate choice. The figure also indicates that while pro-independence and pro-territorial status quo candidates are the most rewarded by like-minded voters, the probabilities are less than one, indicating that of course other issues besides territory still matter.

⁷¹ These results complement those of Rodón and Guinjoan who find that dual-identity Catalan residents are more or less likely to support independence depending on contextual factors; we focus here conditioning on existing intermediate territorial preferences. Toni Rodón and Marc Guinjoan. "When the Context Matters: Identity, Secession and the Spatial Dimension in Catalonia." *Political Geography* 63 (2018), 75-87.

⁷² Also, note that even in the high-congruence cases, the predicted probability choice is not 100%; it is in the range of 80%, which although still very high, indicates relevance of other issues.

⁷³ This could be because Sinn Féin, who are the main advocates of a united Ireland, have also positioned themselves as the main advocates of social welfare. See Agnès Maillot. *Rebels in Government: Is Sinn Féin Ready for Power* (Manchester University Press, 2022). In the May 2022 elections in Northern Ireland, some political observers argue that emphasis on social issues helped the party electorally.

⁷⁴ In the SI (Figure G1), we include the results with predicted selection of candidates with ambiguous territorial positions, who in principle should be more congruent with the pro-autonomy individuals on the territorial issue compared to the pro- or anti-independence candidates. It also shows that for such pro-autonomy individuals, congruence on spending matters more than on territorial preferences.

⁷⁵ Balcells and Kuo 2021. Balcells and Kuo also find that territorial moderates in Catalonia are less affectively polarized about the territorial issue as compared to individuals at the poles. Laia Balcells and Alexander Kuo. "Secessionist conflict and affective polarization: Evidence from Catalonia," *Journal of Peace Research* (2022), OnlineFirst.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221088112>

⁷⁶ Griffiths.