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Repressing Democracy? Independence Referendum Violence and Support for Independence

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Abstract

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This paper examines the impact of state violence on public perceptions of democratic norms. Though states that are more democratic have been shown to engage in fewer human rights abuses, they are not always so well behaved. Notably, the vast literature surrounding public response to violence largely hasn't considered how violence affects the state's domestic perception as a democracy. Focusing on independence movements, I explore the democratic norms intrinsic to independence referenda, and how the state's repression of these movements impacts support for independence by affecting the state's democratic legitimacy. Crucially, I predict that when such violence is against an independence movement that is centered around a referendum, support for independence will increase and perception of democracy will decrease, as the state's use of violence signals to individuals living in the breakaway region that the state is not supportive of democratic political processes. By conducting an original survey experiment in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, this study contributes to the literature on independence movements by theoretically linking violence, democratic norms, and public opinion in the context of secession.

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1 Introduction

Whenever political violence involves the domestic population, such as during mass repression events or insurgent violence against civilians, public opinion is necessarily shaped by the actions of governments, their allies, and their adversaries. Perhaps nowhere is this mixture of public opinion and conflict so potent as during a secessionist movement. Such an all-encompassing change in the structure of the existing institutions often sparks extreme feelings and action, both by those in favor and against. These contentious political debates sometimes spark violence, even in developed democracies; images of voters being beaten and forcibly dragged out of polling places by police dominated international headlines in October 2017 as Spain grappled with the third Catalanian independence referendum attempt in less than a decade, the culmination of over a century of Catalan separatism.

The violent repression of the 2017 Catalanian referendum represented the apex of tensions between the northeastern province and Spain regarding the legitimacy of independence as a path forward. Despite several failed attempts in the past and the certainty with which Madrid would pose fierce legal opposition, the fact that the Catalan independence movement continues to press for a referendum is intriguing. Scholars have canonized this tension as one of both political and democratic legitimacy (Cramer, 2016); when codified law explicitly forbids such action, removing any hope of political legitimacy, separatists are to find some other way to garner sympathy from the movement's various audiences, primarily the domestic public of their province. In the Catalanian case, the movement was centered around an independence referendum that offered all Catalonians a chance to voice their opinion, making it relatively more accessible than many other established methods of demonstrating support for independence, such as protest, civil disobedience, or political violence, all of which require a much higher cost of participation (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008).

Given that independence referenda do not always occur in secessionist movements, both the circumstances surrounding their emergence and their interaction with other common fea-

tures of intrastate conflict, such as violence, is worthy of study. In this paper, I focus on the importance of specific aspects of the secessionist movement itself, namely its chosen method of seeking independence, arguing that repression has different effects on the public conditional on these chosen methods. Existing work details the interaction of various methods, both violent and nonviolent, used to petition the central government for self-determination (Cunningham et al., 2017), as well as the response of the international public to the various tactics and facets of rebel groups more generally (Arves et al., 2019). Combining these two areas of research, I seek to answer the question: how does state repression of independence movements affect support for independence? When citizens learn of violence from the parent state against an independence movement, I argue that they receive information about the parent state's willingness to use violence, and use this information in their decision calculus about whether or not to support independence. Previous scholarship has attempted to establish the relationship between state repression and dissent (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011), and has only recently begun to include independence movements in this analysis (Balcells et al., 2020).

This paper makes an important contribution to the literature on state violence by elucidating one of many possible mechanisms for the change in public support for dissidence after state repression, a notable gap in the current literature (Balcells et al., 2020). I argue that an independence movement centered around a referendum will be perceived as more democratic due to its adherence to democratic norms, such as voting and consent of the governed. As a result, state repression of a movement perceived as more democratic will lower the public's perception of the state's commitment to democratic ideals, which in turn increases sympathy towards independence.

The following section reviews the literature about democratic norms and institutional legitimacy, repression and dissent in independence movements, and public response to state violence. I then propose a theory of democratic legitimacy in independence movements, linking government repression of democratic processes such as voting to both increased sym-

pathy for independence movements who perform such practices and a lower perception of the state's own democratic legitimacy. This is followed by the design and execution of an original survey experiment with which I will measure reactions to both violent and nonviolent responses by the central government to independence movements that use referenda and those that do not. The final sections discuss avenues for further research and conclude.

2 Determinants of Support for Independence

Previous work on individual attitudes towards independence has largely focused on the impact of ethnic identity and nationalism (Sarigil and Karakoc, 2016; Serrano, 2013; Rodon and Guinjoan, 2018), the prospect of economic success of the newly independent state (Gehring and Schneider, 2020; Dion, 1996; Munõz and Tormos, 2015), and the likelihood of joining international organizations post-independence (Muro and Vlaskamp, 2016). Meanwhile, comparatively little work has considered the effect of violence during an independence campaign on support for secession. Beber et al. (2014), examining the South Sudanese independence referendum in an original survey experiment, find that exposure to riots by Southerners led to a more favorable opinion of Southern independence among Northerners, but their work does not consider the opinion of those who would be living in the state should it actually become independent. Such people are important in the context of a referendum because they are the key voters whose perceptions of their political prospects under the victorious regime will affect their decision.

Balcells et al. (2020) find a relationship between state violence and support for independence in Catalonia using observational polling data, but relatively little else is known about how political violence may affect domestic attitudes toward secession, and what is known is limited in scope and causal inference (Beber et al., 2014). Therefore, the question remains of just how nuanced these opinions are and which factors of political violence drive them. This paper contributes to the literature on individual attitudes towards independence

by continuing to explore the impact of violence on such attitudes, introducing a previously unexplored mechanism: democratic legitimacy and the salience of democratic norms to the domestic public. Recent work has shown that there is a connection between domestic support for democratic policies and independence in specific contexts (Kelmendi and Pedraza, 2021). However, there is little extant evidence that independence referenda themselves are interpreted as and associated with democratic processes, nor that these democratic norms factor into the public’s decision calculus when deciding whether or not to support independence. In the next section, I outline my theory of democratic legitimacy in independence movements that links public opinion, state violence, and secession.

3 Democratic Legitimacy During Secession

3.1 The Independence Movement

Scholars of mass social movements have documented the various nonviolent methods by which dissident groups (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Arves et al., 2019) and specifically self-determination movements (Cunningham et al., 2017; Shaykhutdinov, 2010) can achieve their political goals. However, previous work has offered limited insight into how the tactics of groups that seek outright independence impact the likelihood of achieving independence. Shaykhutdinov (2010) makes an important distinction between less extreme demands, such as increased autonomy, and independence, in his analysis of the various methods that self-determination movements use to secure territorial autonomy agreements with the parent state.

Faced with the question of independence, a key consideration of the domestic public is how life under the potential new regime, be it a continuation of the parent state’s rule or an establishment of a new independent government, will compare to the status quo (North et al., 1999). Both sides of an independence campaign actively attempt to convince voters that they will serve their needs more effectively than the parent state, exemplified in 2014

by Scottish unionists' "Better Together" campaign, whose messaging signaled to voters that they would be best served by a Scotland that remained unified with the United Kingdom. In an effort to make their case to voters, independence movements must establish themselves as legitimate candidates for governance of the country. The remainder of this section details the previous work on how independence movements communicate legitimacy to their various audiences and advances a theory of how independence movements' legitimacy is affected by their choice to use independence referenda.

Processes such as the 2014 Scottish referendum have, as Cramer (2016) describes, political legitimacy because they operate through established political channels. Indeed, the 2014 referendum campaign was legal and its terms mutually agreed upon by both the central government of the United Kingdom and the subnational government of Scotland, and the outcome was to be recognized as official by all parties involved, no matter the result. However, not all independence movements possess this political legitimacy. There are numerous examples throughout history of independence movements utilizing extralegal or even violent methods of separating from their parent state.

In her assessment of the determinants of international recognition of secessionist movements, Baer (2000) generalizes the "how" of secession as procedural legitimacy; she argues that "the fashion how a polity promotes its claim for secession, leads to assumptions determining the new state's ability to manage, keep and exercise sovereignty in the future." I aim to understand the role that legitimacy plays in conditioning the public's response to repression of independence movements, focusing specifically on that of the democratic norms implicit in independence referenda.

To this end, Cramer (2016) describes the democratic legitimacy associated with referenda as having been derived from the voting and campaign procedures typically involved in a referendum. These practices are believed to matter to audiences, who are looking for the movement to display some level of competence in governance. Drawing from previous scholarship, I define an independence movement's democratic legitimacy as the perception

by the public that the movement makes a concerted effort to be inclusive and representative of all citizens of the secessionist region. Thus, an independence referendum lends democratic legitimacy to a secessionist movement because staking a region's bid for secession on a referendum requires transparency about the state of public opinion about independence. A highly successful referendum can demonstrate that independence is an outcome that is widely desired by those who live in the breakaway region, while a poorly attended one will convey the opposite. Compared to other self-determination goals, independence is often considered an extreme course of action (Shaykhutdinov, 2010), and the idea that only a small, radical faction of the population actually support secession may diminish the movement's perceived legitimacy; a referendum shows that the movement intends to adhere to democratic norms in its quest for a new state.

Precedence for such a conception of democratic legitimacy exists in the aforementioned Catalan referendum of 2017. The slogan *'votar és democràcia'* became synonymous with the Catalan demands for a representative process by which to answer the question of independence. Democratic legitimacy was synonymous with the option to meaningfully express one's opinion at the ballot box. Returning to Baer's concept of procedural legitimacy, the use of a democratic process by an independence movement may give some indication of how the newly independent state will govern moving forward. In this case, a commitment to the democratic process of voting in a referendum would signal to the the public that secession could potentially provide a viable alternative to governance by the parent state; this benefit of a democratic process would especially stand out should the independence movement face violent repression from the central government. As detailed in the next section, I argue that the state's response to an independence referendum has important implications for the progression of the movement and public opinion of the parent regime.

3.2 The Parent State

3.2.1 Strategic Violence

An attempt by a substate entity to mobilize the public by means of a democratic process such as voting may be met with resistance. Chaudhry (2016) finds that NGOs which advocate for reform through democratic channels are often met with repression, both violent and nonviolent. The Basque political party *Batasuna* was banned by Spain in 2003, causing controversy over the impact of this punitive measure on the democratic representation of Basque interests (Cram, 2008). The same can be said for independence movements, which are often comprised of many NGOs and other organizations coordinated in pursuit of their political goals (Cunningham et al., 2017).

In order to consider the impact of violence on public opinion in any specific context, one must acknowledge the potentially strategic, non-random nature of such violence. Proponents of the strategic choice framework characterize state repression as a calculated move by the central government, one made in response to dissent from the public and after considering the costs and benefits of such an extreme action. Thus, some scholars argue that states are more likely to repress their citizens as the threat of dissent rises (Franklin, 1997; Gartner and Regan, 1996; Lichbach, 1998). It is thus important to take into account that violence is not a random act, and that it arises as a result of several interconnected factors.

3.2.2 Public Response to State Violence

I predict that the use of violence against a secessionist movement will have different effects on public opinion about independence conditional on the perceived legitimacy of the movement. In turn, I further argue that such legitimacy is in part determined by the methods used by the independence movement in their quest for independence, and that the state's legitimacy will result from an interaction of the movement's methods and the state's response to these methods. International audiences have been shown to pay attention to the behavior of groups

that challenge the authority of the government (Arves et al., 2019), but as detailed above, even more important for secessionists is winning the approval of those who would be living in the independent state should secession occur.

The effect of state violence on dissent has been documented by scholars of repression and conflict, including in the specific context of democracies (Carey, 2006), but little work has focused specifically on dissent as support for independence, and indeed the question remains unanswered. Even within the same context there are conflicting findings; some find that state violence against independence movements has little impact on dissent in terms of electoral mobilization (Barceló, 2018), while others find that exposure to such violence increases support for independence, heightens negative perceptions of the state and increases sympathy for anti-government causes (Balcells et al., 2020). I aim to contribute to the ongoing study of violence on support for secession by establishing the mechanism of democratic norms as an impetus for the public's decision about independence.

As discussed above, the use of an independence referendum can contribute to the democratic legitimacy of an independence movement by showing the movement's commitment to including as many people as possible in the decision-making process and being transparent about the results of the endeavor through a public vote. The question largely remains of how the central government's own democratic legitimacy is affected by their response to an independence referendum challenging their sovereign authority. Despite the state's interest in maintaining territorial autonomy within its borders, the state must consider the potential consequences of its response to demands for independence. Given that such demands arise when a non-trivial portion of the populace is questioning their future under the rule of the current regime, the actions of the state are under close scrutiny by the public.

I argue that, in addition to the independence movement itself, the central government also possesses a varying degree of democratic legitimacy dependent on how it responds to an independence movement (Sorens, 2012). Adopting Cramer's (2016) description of democratic legitimacy of independence movements, I define a state's democratic legitimacy

as the state's reaction to and accommodation of widespread nonviolent popular dissent. Specifically, the state's democratic legitimacy in the eyes of the domestic public is contingent on their response to an independence movement that desires a referendum. Should the government respond violently to an independence referendum, their democratic legitimacy as a governing body may suffer, as it shows they are not supportive of democratic processes of dissent.

4 Hypotheses

In accordance with my theory, I predict the following:

Hypothesis 1 *When an independence movement calls for a referendum on independence, the movement's democratic legitimacy among the domestic public will increase compared to a movement which does not call for a referendum.*

Hypothesis 2 *When a state violently represses an independence movement calling for a referendum, support for independence among the domestic public will increase compared to a nonviolent state response.*

Hypothesis 3 *When a state violently represses an independence movement calling for a referendum, the state's democratic legitimacy among the domestic public will decrease compared to a nonviolent state response.*

To review, my predictions hinge on the idea that an independence movement centered around a referendum will be seen as possessing greater democratic legitimacy because it is centered around a democratic process, the purpose of which is to represent the desires of all of those living in the secessionist region. Upon witnessing violence against a democratic independence movement, the domestic public will grow increasingly skeptical of the government's commitment to upholding democratic norms, and as a result will be more likely to support independence.

Importantly, when an independence movement solicits the parent state for separation in a referendum, there are often hardliners on both sides of the issue. In the context of independence movements, these often take the form of nationalists, who are committed to achieving independence at any cost, and unionists, who are staunchly against secession. For these extremely opinionated voters, there is a much lower chance that they will change their opinion, even in response to an extreme event like state violence. Therefore, the voters of interest in this study are those that are undecided or may take a more moderate position on independence; these voters can still be convinced of the merits of living under either regime in the future. Indeed, these voters are often the ones who decide such heavily contested political questions; while the 2017 Catalanian referendum received overwhelming support among those who voted, turnout was relatively low, indicating that many were either undecided about or unsupportive of independence, which heavily detracted from the impact of the referendum results. It is this population whose opinions can cause a major shift in electoral outcomes about independence.

As an aside, vote choice is likely not the only behavior affected by witnessing state violence against an independence movement. Those who consider violence by the state against demonstrators abhorrent may express their dissent in other ways, such as voting for a political party with stronger advocacy for concessions to national minorities. However, I argue that this voter's baseline opinion of the regime is nonetheless lower, and therefore they are now more likely to prefer to live under the rule of another, even if the impetus to actually cast a vote for independence is not reached.

5 Survey Design

As discussed earlier, our current knowledge about the impact of violence on support for independence is scarce, and that which does exist lacks a clear causal mechanism explaining the relationship (Balcells et al., 2020; Beber et al., 2014). Furthermore, since violence cannot

be truly randomized in an experimental setting, a survey experiment with informational vignettes is one method of achieving a reasonably close approximation of random assignment.

5.0.1 Sample

I surveyed 392 respondents recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform with an Indian sample, a site chosen for two reasons, one practical and one theoretical. First, India is one of the only countries besides the United States with a consistently large MTurk pool from which to draw a sample. While many surveys hosted on MTurk draw respondents from the United States, the concepts of secession and ethnic conflict are likely not salient to most Americans, having never experienced such events in their lifetimes. By contrast, India has and continues to deal with several separatist movements (Bhaumik, 2004), and therefore contentious ethnic politics is much more familiar to those who live there. This familiarity affords me greater confidence that any responses are sincere reactions to the questions posed and based on some degree of lived experience with the subject matter.

Second, as I discuss in subsequent sections, I design my experimental vignettes around the ongoing Tamil nationalist movement in Southern India, specifically in the state of Tamil Nadu. One of the goals of this paper is to gain insight into the opinions of those who would be living in the independent state should secession take place; therefore, the citizens of Tamil Nadu are my target audience. However, I was unable to directly sample from a specific Indian state using MTurk, and therefore I had to draw from the entire country. In any other setting in which a specific respondent pool is required, this would have posed a problem for acquiring a sample with enough relevant respondents to make analysis possible without overspending on a sample as large as possible to try to get as many Tamil Nadu respondents as possible. However, another reason the choice of Tamil Nadu is ideal is because residents of Tamil Nadu are significantly overrepresented in India's MTurk pool (Boas et al., 2020). In their comparison of online sample recruiting platforms Facebook, Qualtrics and MTurk, Boas et al. collected an MTurk sample which contained 47% residents of the state of Tamil Nadu,

more than double the next highest state, Kerala, also in southern India. The MTurk sample collected for the survey happened to be far more representative; of the 392 respondents, 279 (71.2%) were from Tamil Nadu, alleviating concerns about a diluted sample.

5.0.2 Setting

My experiment is centered around the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu (see Figure 1), whose ethnic Tamil have been seeking greater recognition and protection of their distinct ethnic heritage, primarily through resistance of the imposition of the Hindi language over their native Tamil, one of the oldest surviving classical languages in the world and an important talisman of Tamil identity, as well as the encroachment of Christian missionaries onto sacred religious properties and lands.

The most recent example of Tamil nationalism turning violent occurred in 2017, at which time thousands in Tamil Nadu were protesting the recent Supreme Court ban on *jallikattu*, a bull-taming sport that Tamils identify as an integral part of their culture; thus, the proclamation was seen as an attack on their identity by the central government. Protests ensued, with even children in attendance holding signs bearing the Tamil slogan, "first the bull, and then a separate Tamil Nadu" (Yamunan, 2017). This indicated that secessionist aspirations simmered within the region, despite the hesitance by Tamil politicians to echo such desires, describing them as "evil forces" and "extremists" (The Tribune, 2017). Clashes between police and protesters soon overtook the demonstrations, even though the government of Tamil Nadu reassured the public that police "maintained restraint" and used "minimal forces" when dealing with these protests.

While independence as a policy goal is not at the forefront of the movement, I maintain that the components of my study are salient enough to residents of Tamil Nadu that they are able to form opinions sensitive to informational treatment. I follow the example of Huff and Kruszewska (2016) by choosing a setting to which the issue of independence is salient but not overly prevalent in the local political discourse. In this way, in addition to the practical

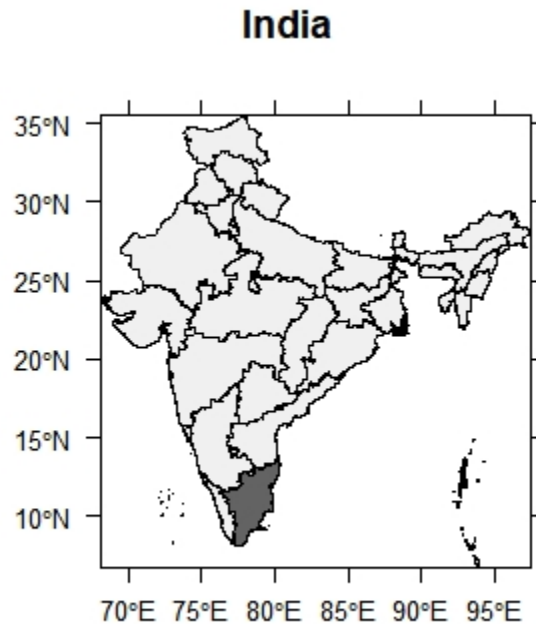


Figure 1: Location of Tamil Nadu in India

sampling concerns outlined above, I argue that Tamil Nadu represents a mostly ideal setting, even despite there being other, more active independence movements taking place in India, like that of the state of Punjab in Northern India.

5.1 Pre-Treatment Questions

To begin the survey, I gather information about several characteristics which may affect the subjects' responses to questions about violence in independence movements. I start by inquiring about general demographic characteristics, including age, sex, occupation, income, education, religious affiliation, ethnicity, national origin, languages spoken, news consumption and area of residence (urban, suburban, rural).

In addition to physical demographic characteristics, I include pre-treatment measurements of political affiliation and past voting history, as well as a question about political ideology. As a more direct measure, I include questions about their preexisting opinions on the ability of states and other subnational entities to seek independence; it is important

to account for potential outliers, in this case those in the respondent pool who entered the survey with especially strong opinions about independence, when analyzing the results. I also measure opinions towards the use of violence, both in general and as a vehicle for political change; those who see violence as less acceptable may be more sensitive to it. Finally, questions designed to measure nationalist sentiment allow me to discover which respondents are more radical in their opinions about ethnic separatism, and therefore may be affected differently by the treatment than someone without such extreme views. These questions are comprised of both original language and language adopted from similar questions in the South East Europe Social Survey Project (SEESSP). The battery of pre-treatment questions is displayed in Figure 2.

1. Violence is necessary for real systemic political change.
2. All countries should aspire to be democracies.
3. Ethnic groups who feel unequal have the right to seek independence.
4. The central government should treat all ethnic groups equally.
5. Voting is one of the best ways to improve society.
6. Violence is only justified when it is in self-defense against an aggressor.
7. One can feel safe only when the majority of their countrymen is of the same ethnic group as they are.
8. Fighting for your ethnic group brings dignity and honor.
9. Regardless of the circumstances, the law should be obeyed.

Figure 2: Pre-Treatment Questions

5.2 Vignettes

5.2.1 Stage One: Independence Movement

The treatment will be administered in a series of two vignettes, with response questions following each. All vignettes take the form of informational treatments presented as hypothetical news articles about a recent demonstration in Tamil Nadu. In the first vignette, all respondents will learn about an independence movement taking place in Tamil Nadu. In addition to providing the context for the outcome questions to come, I also aim to provide evidence for my base assumption that independence referenda are perceived as democratic processes and thus will be viewed as a more democratic method of seeking independence. Thus, respondents will be randomly sorted into a control group and a treatment group, and because my primary hypotheses require the presence of a referendum to be held constant, I select just one eighth of respondents to receive the control condition of no referendum to sacrifice as little statistical power as possible in the second stage. The control vignette describes a demonstration for a Tamil independence movement that does not include a referendum on independence, and the treatment vignette describes the same movement but mentions that the movement is asking for a public referendum on independence. Figure 3 shows the stage one vignette featuring both the treatment and control conditions.

5.2.2 Stage Two: State Response

After answering some response questions following the first vignette (detailed in the next section), all respondents will proceed to a second vignette, where they will be randomly sorted into one of two possible treatment statuses: a violent or a non-violent state response to the independence movement.

My theory about the effect of violence on independence movements that use a referendum is predicated on the idea that repression of an independence referendum will lower the

CHENNAI – Massive protests took place in the Indian state of Tami Nadu among renewed calls by ethnic Tamil for independence.

An estimated 10,000 people participated in a protest in the Tamil Nadu capital of Chennai, calling for independence from India.

Sanjeevan Malayaman, a supporter of Tamil independence and one of the protest's organizers, told reporters that they strongly believe that "independence is the best way to move forward on this crucial question for the future of Tamil Nadu."

CHENNAI – Massive protests took place in the Indian state of Tami Nadu among renewed calls by ethnic Tamil for independence.

An estimated 10,000 people participated in a protest in the Tamil Nadu capital of Chennai, calling for [a referendum on] independence from Spain.

Sanjeevan Malayaman, a supporter of Tamil independence and one of the protest's organizers, hoped that today would make it clear that all citizens of Tamil Nadu would have the ability to express their opinion on independence by voting in a referendum.

"We strongly believe that [a referendum on] independence is the best way to move forward on this crucial question for the future of Tamil Nadu," Malayaman said. "A democratic approach is best for everyone's voice to be heard."

Figure 3: Stage One Vignettes – Control and Treatment

democratic legitimacy of the parent state and increase support for independence. In order to properly demonstrate this mechanism at work, I introduce a placebo test into my design through a second treatment vignette in the second stage. By giving the reader information about a nonviolent response by the state to an independence referendum, I am able to validate the uniqueness of violence as an impetus for the reduction of perceived democratic legitimacy of the central government and support for independence. If a nonviolent, but still punitive, response to the referendum were to cause a similar reduction in the democratic legitimacy of the parent state, then my theory would find less support.

Through simple randomization, about half of the respondents will be presented with a

vignette that outlines a violent response to the independence movement, namely the state repressing participants at a pro-independence demonstration. The remaining half of respondents will receive information that, in response to the independence movement calling for a referendum, the central government stopped financial transfers to the secessionist region. It is possible that support for independence will increase regardless of the nature of the response, as there is still a negative reaction that may directly impact the public through reduced resources available for public goods and other functions of state government. However, since such political action does not directly affect the ability of the public to express their opinion in a referendum in the way that violent repression does, the state's democratic legitimacy should remain intact. By including a placebo test in stage two, I can provide stronger evidence that violent repression of democratic processes during independence movements affects the public's perception of democracy under the current regime. Figures 4 and 5 display both of the second stage vignettes, with treatment-specific language highlighted.

5.3 Outcome Variables

After reading the stage one vignette, respondents will be asked to respond to two opinion statements. One is in support of Tamil independence and the other asserts that the independence movement conducted itself democratically. Respondents will select their response from a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with the central option being neutral. After both stages of treatment have been administered, respondents will again answer the questions they faced after stage one. Any changes in the perception of the central government's democratic legitimacy as well as support for independence from stage one to stage two represents the impact of the state's response to the referendum on my key outcome variables. Figure 6 displays the language of the outcome questions.

CHENNAI – [Officials in New Delhi have responded to the calls for a referendum on secession in Tamil Nadu after massive peaceful protests took place throughout the province among renewed fervor by ethnic Tamil for independence.

The central government has announced that financial transfers to the Tamil Nadu government have been severely cut, including funding for several key infrastructure and public policy initiatives.]

An estimated 10,000 people participated in a protest in the Tamil Nadu capital of Chennai, calling for a referendum on independence from India. Officials in New Delhi have condemned the movement, calling it divisive and detrimental to the unity and strength of India.

A government spokesperson provided the following statement regarding the independence movement. “With their decisions, they have consistently shown an unacceptable disloyalty towards the powers of the state, creating solely division and weakening our great nation.”

Figure 4: Stage Two Vignette – Financial Transfers

5.4 Analysis

Given that all respondents are randomly assigned to treatment groups, I estimate the average treatment effect (ATE) by finding the difference of the mean Likert score response to each outcome question across treatment groups. As mentioned previously, the two main outcome variables are support for independence and perception of democratic legitimacy of the independence movement and parent state, scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing strong support for independence and a high perception of democratic legitimacy, respectively. Taking into account my hypotheses, I anticipate that the mean score of the outcome variable that measures support for independence will be higher in stage two than in stage one. I also predict that the mean score of the outcome variable for perception of the democratic legitimacy of the parent state will be lower for those who received the violence vignette in stage two compared to those who received the vignette about cutting financial transfers to Tamil Nadu. All tables display coefficients which include the pre-treatment

CHENNAI – [Numerous injuries were reported as the Indian National Police deployed tear gas, rubber bullets and batons against the mass peaceful protests in support of a referendum on independence that have been taking place this week throughout Tamil Nadu.]

An estimated 10,000 people participated in a protest in the Tamil Nadu capital of Chennai, calling for a referendum on independence from India. Officials in New Delhi have condemned the movement, calling it divisive and detrimental to the unity and strength of India.

A government spokesperson provided the following statement regarding the independence movement. "With their decisions, they have consistently shown an unacceptable disloyalty towards the powers of the state, creating solely division and weakening our great nation."

Figure 5: Stage Two Vignette – State Violence

indices mentioned above.

With regard to Hypothesis 1, I find no statistically significant support for the relationship between an independence movement's use of a referendum and their perceived commitment to democratic ideals. Table 1 shows the ATE of the mean Likert score for support for independence (1) and the perceived democratic legitimacy of the independence movement (2). Both coefficients are positive, meaning that, when the independence movement called for a referendum, respondents were more likely to support independence and characterize the movement's strategy for achieving independence as democratic. However, these results do not achieve statistical significance and are therefore indistinguishable from random chance.

Hypothesis 2 and 3 are not supported; Table 2 demonstrates that, holding the presence of a referendum constant, there is in fact no meaningful difference in support for independence nor democratic perception of the central government contingent upon the state's response to a referendum movement. Tables 3 and 4 further demonstrate an opposite relationship than that predicted. There is no meaningful difference between support for independence nor perceived democratic legitimacy of the parent state when the state uses violence against a referendum movement or a non-referendum movement. On the contrary, when the state halts

After stage one vignette:

1. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement: Tamil Nadu should be an independent state.
2. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement: the independence movement was trying to reach a democratic outcome for the citizens of Tamil Nadu.

After stage two vignette:

1. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement: Tamil Nadu should be an independent state.
2. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement: the central government was trying to reach a democratic outcome for the citizens of Tamil Nadu.

Figure 6: Outcome Questions

financial transfers to the secessionist province, support for independence decreases when there is a referendum involved relative to a non-referendum movement. Furthermore, the public's perception of the parent state's commitment to democracy is damaged when transfers are halted in response to a referendum movement relative to a non-referendum movement. In other words, state violence against a referendum does not appear to have any meaningful impact on democratic legitimacy nor support for independence, but economic consequences levied by the center in response to a referendum movement does have a significant effect on both outcomes.

These results provide initial evidence that the public may not consider violence from the government as indicative of a lack of commitment to democratic principles. Seeing as there is a significant relationship, conditional on the state stopping financial transfers

Table 1: Stage One Results

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Support for Indep. (1)	Group Dem. Legitimacy (2)
Referendum	0.305 (0.222)	0.294 (0.205)
<i>Nationalism Index</i>	-0.133** (0.052)	-0.034 (0.048)
<i>Democracy Index</i>	0.011 (0.052)	-0.089* (0.048)
<i>Violence Index</i>	-0.005 (0.056)	-0.038 (0.052)
Constant	3.635*** (0.682)	3.958*** (0.628)
Observations	211	211
R ²	0.056	0.052
Adjusted R ²	0.038	0.034
Residual Std. Error (df = 206)	1.197	1.103
F Statistic (df = 4; 206)	3.080**	2.835**

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
All significance tests shown are two-tailed.

Table 2: Stage Two Results (Referendum Group)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Support for Indep. (1)	State Dem. Legitimacy (2)
State Violence	-0.245 (0.170)	0.111 (0.157)
<i>Nationalism Index</i>	0.078 (0.055)	0.042 (0.050)
<i>Democracy Index</i>	0.012 (0.054)	0.099** (0.050)
<i>Violence Index</i>	0.077 (0.057)	0.093* (0.052)
Constant	2.097*** (0.682)	1.199* (0.630)
Observations	176	176
R ²	0.056	0.092
Adjusted R ²	0.034	0.071
Residual Std. Error (df = 171)	1.118	1.032
F Statistic (df = 4; 171)	2.532**	4.326***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
All significance tests shown are two-tailed.

Table 3: State Response – Cut Transfers

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Support for Indep. (1)	State Dem. Legitimacy (2)
Referendum	-0.489# (0.292)	-0.550# (0.298)
<i>Nationalism Index</i>	0.025 (0.062)	0.087 (0.063)
<i>Democracy Index</i>	0.076 (0.065)	0.087 (0.066)
<i>Violence Index</i>	0.064 (0.067)	0.070 (0.069)
Constant	2.514*** (0.853)	1.554* (0.869)
Observations	107	107
R ²	0.077	0.142
Adjusted R ²	0.041	0.108
Residual Std. Error (df = 102)	1.011	1.030
F Statistic (df = 4; 102)	2.127*	4.219***

Notes:

indicates statistical significance in direction opposite of prediction; all significance tests shown are two-tailed.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: State Response – Violence

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Support for Indep. (1)	State Dem. Legitimacy (2)
Referendum	−0.270 (0.294)	−0.048 (0.239)
<i>Nationalism Index</i>	0.143* (0.076)	−0.004 (0.062)
<i>Democracy Index</i>	0.016 (0.070)	0.088 (0.057)
<i>Violence Index</i>	0.103 (0.080)	0.122* (0.065)
Constant	1.065 (0.937)	1.837** (0.762)
Observations	104	104
R ²	0.130	0.089
Adjusted R ²	0.094	0.052
Residual Std. Error (df = 99)	1.184	0.963
F Statistic (df = 4; 99)	3.683***	2.412*

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
All significance tests shown are two-tailed.

to the secessionist region, between democratic legitimacy of the parent state and the use of a referendum by the independence movement, it is clear that referenda may connote a commitment democratic principles in certain circumstances. However, the lack of impact of violence against a referendum versus a non-referendum independence movement suggests that there is something fundamentally different about the use of violence to punish political dissent compared to the use of established institutional methods for quelling dissent.

Such results may be the result of the setting; compared to other democracies which are more developed, India has been more likely to experience violence at the hands of government officials compared to Spain, to return to the motivating case. There does not seem to be any significant negative reaction to the use of violence by the central government, including one that would indicate a reduction in the perceived democratic legitimacy of the parent state. This is perhaps because those who live in states similar to India, which do indeed function as democracies but still experience violence, have become accustomed to their democratic state functioning with the threat of government violence always present. As a result, violence does not seem as incompatible with democratic ideals as it would in a state like Spain, whose episode of violence against independence voters was largely seen as unprecedented and shocking.

Given this lack of cognitive dissonance between democracy and violence, it would therefore make sense that political institutional powers, in the case of the survey financial transfers, would be seen as more antithetical to democratic function. The central government cutting off necessary public goods resources may appear as more castigating and more of a barrier to democratic expression, especially to those who live in developing countries with poorer public infrastructure. If this survey had been conducted in a more developed democracy with efficient public infrastructure, perhaps even in a quite powerful province within such a democracy like Catalonia, the threat of financial transfer reduction, while still punitive, would perhaps be considered less of an obstacle to democracy than violent repression.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

This paper faces a significant problem of selection bias. Not only is the incidence of secession non-random, but of the population of secessionist movements that have taken place throughout history, it is more than likely the case that referenda occur in certain independence movements and not in others. Therefore, further research must be conducted that takes into account the origins of independence referenda and how the conditions which inspire them may also impact their procedure, results, and any responses from other actors. It may be the case that some independence movements use referenda specifically because it will provoke a harsh response from the state in order to evoke greater sympathy for the independence cause. I anticipate that in regions where government violence is more common, this strategy is more likely to be the reason behind holding a referendum. This is perhaps the reason why the Tamil nationalist movement has not made formal referendum proceedings against the state of India; violence is a serious possibility there, whereas the violence exhibited by the Spanish government was largely unprecedented.

Given the funding limitations of this project, it is entirely possible that the survey sample was not ideal to answer questions about ongoing independence movements. A more appropriate sample would have been in an environment which could more directly relate to the specific question of secession. While the Tamil Nadu nationalist movement has had secessionist undertones throughout its occurrence, there has been no significant attempt to separate from the state of India in recent years. Methodologically, this makes it difficult to ascertain how accurate the responses provided by the participants are in capturing their true behavior. In future studies, a more appropriate setting such as Spain itself, or some other developed democracy which has had experience with questions of secession, would likely garner results that may fit more with my proposed theory.

Avenues for further research include a more fundamental examination of the democratic norms that may or may not be associated with independence referenda apart from their

interaction with state violence. Independence movements have taken several paths towards achieving their political aims, from conventional political strategies such as parliamentary votes and negotiation with the central government to more rebellious measures such as mass protests and civil disobedience, with some even escalating into armed conflict. Independence referenda have consistently been understudied by scholars of both conflict and political institutions, and there is still much to learn about how these voting processes square with other democratic procedures featured in governments around the world.

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7 Appendix

7.1 Principal Component Analysis

In order to determine which of the pre-treatment questions produced the best combination to be included in an additive index of nationalism, tolerance for violence, or democratic values, I conducted principal component analysis (PCA). Although I designed the pre-treatment questions with combinations already in mind, conducting PCA was nonetheless informative, as it indicated that including the pre-treatment question about the central government treating all ethnic groups equally reduced the effectiveness of my nationalism index in capturing an underlying concept. Table 5 displays the indices and their factor loadings. The larger the factor loading, the more influential the question is for the index.

Table 5: Principal Component Analysis

Index	Question	Factor Loading
<i>Nationalism</i>	Ethnic groups who feel unequal have the right to seek independence.	0.649
<i>Nationalism</i>	Fighting for your ethnic group brings dignity and honor.	0.566
<i>Nationalism</i>	One can only feel safe when the majority of their countrymen are of the same ethnic group as them.	0.508
<i>Violence</i>	Violence is necessary for real systemic political change.	-0.707
<i>Violence</i>	Violence is only justified in self-defense against an aggressor.	-0.707
<i>Democracy</i>	All countries should aspire to be democracies.	0.563
<i>Democracy</i>	Voting is one of the best ways to improve society.	0.570
<i>Democracy</i>	Regardless of the circumstances, the law should be obeyed.	0.599

7.2 Power Analysis

I calculate the sample size required using EPGAP's power calculator. Assuming statistical significance of 0.05, with a goal of .8 power, and an estimated treatment effect size of 0.15 (on my Likert scale) with a standard deviation of .3, I would need 126 participants per treatment condition. Multiplying 126 by my three treatment states, I require 378 total participants. My assumptions are plotted in Figure 7.

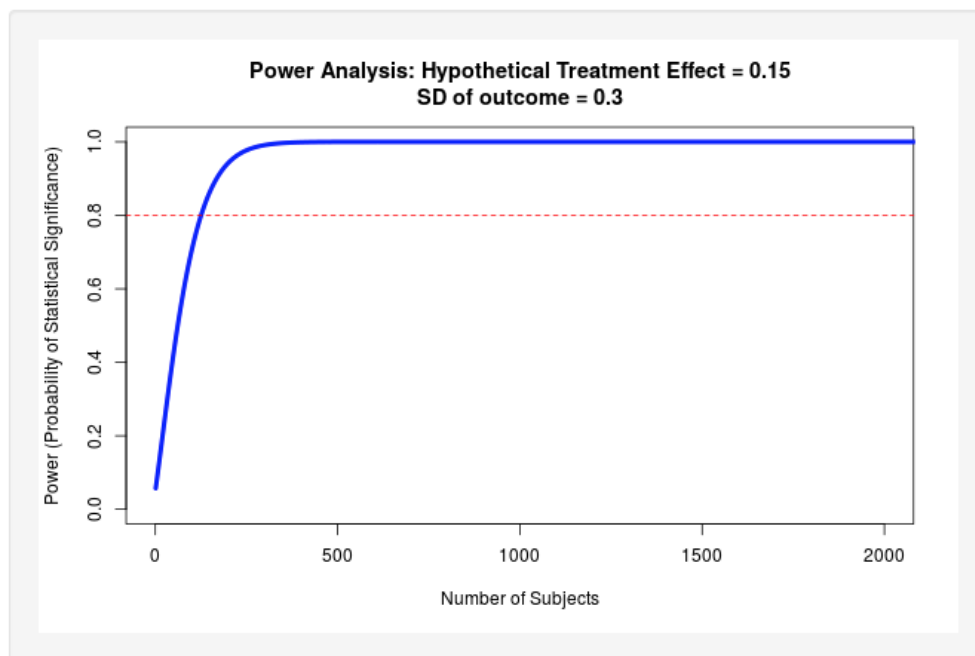


Figure 7: Power Analysis