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Introduction

The establishment of a decentralized government system can assist states that have high levels of tension. Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom, and Spain are states whose government systems incorporated decentralization to appease issues between their core and peripheral actors. Although decentralization was implemented to assist these countries, it is questionable whether these methods strengthened their abilities.

Michael Hechter discusses how states become stronger in Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development. He argues that a core and a periphery exist in all states. The core represents the more dominant culture. The periphery is the less developed group. Hechter claims, “The establishment of regular interaction between the core and the periphery is seen to be crucial for national development.” Ultimately, as the core and periphery come together, a state's potential for greatness increases. This study will compare how Yugoslavia’s, the United Kingdom’s, and Spain’s populations settled into their regions, the institutional arrangements that were put into place to govern their people, and the social pressures that caused these systems to change.

As pressures due to differences in language, religion, and ethnicity arose, these countries’ governments shifted. Their systems incorporated decentralization to grant separate regions higher levels of autonomy. This shift caused Yugoslavia’s system to fail. Devolution in the United Kingdom has increased Scotland’s desire to secede. Additionally, Catalonia’s frustrations with Spain have made it want to separate from its federalist system. Although devolution and federalism attempted to lessen tensions in the United Kingdom and Spain, their systems have given too much power to their respective regions. This phenomenon, also known as a move towards a “Europe of the Regions” has put the European Union at jeopardy. Rather than supporting decentralization, Europe’s countries must implement policies that reduce the possibility of state fragmentation and maintain the European Union’s stability.

Yugoslavia

The establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

Ethnic groups from the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled what was formally known as Yugoslavia since the Middle Ages. The South Slavs, also known as the Serbs, dominated the Ottoman Empire and
practiced Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Islam. The Slovenes and Croats practiced Roman Catholicism and lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During the 1830s, the Serbs revolted against the Ottoman Empire and created a separate state. They then expanded into other areas. This extension added a number of smaller, peripheral groups that were labeled as Serbs (Sekulic 1997, 168). Rather than having their different cultures recognized, they forcefully adopted Slavic identities. According to Dusko Sekulic,

> We can conclude that the expansion of the Serbian state was on the one hand based on the incorporation of the ethnic Serbs into the Serbian state. When that basis for expansion was shaky the ethnic groups inhabiting the targeted territories were simply proclaimed to be Serbs unaware of their true identity.

The Serbs were concerned that western empires could overthrow them due to a lack of centrality. This concern made them feel that they had to unite these peoples.

After World War I, the allies at Versailles created the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It was ruled under a Serbian leader. It also incorporated a multi-parliamentary democracy and ethnically based political parties. During the parliamentary election in 1920 on whether to support unification, over sixty percent of the voters in Croatia-Slavonia voted against unification. Serbs, however, advocated for centralism to maintain their higher status. These varying sentiments lasted as Yugoslavia functioned as a constitutional monarchy. Although the risks of placing these ethnic groups were great, the Allies agreed to have them ruled under the same constitutional monarchy to establish a stable state. This order lasted until it fell in 1928 due to these varying opinions on centralization.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was established in 1929 after Yugoslavia's constitutional monarchy fell. It was ruled under King Alexander until Croat and Macedonian extremists assassinated him in 1934. The major difference between Yugoslavia's ethnic groups was that the non-Serbs desired a federal state. Serbs, however, advocated for a central government system to increase their power. This division caused a movement "in the direction of anti-Serbianism and anti-Yugoslavism, because the Yugoslav idea became equated with Serbian domination." These concerns were similar to the ones held by ethnic groups during the reign of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

Yugoslavia's rise as a federalist regime

Yugoslavia became a socialist federal republic in 1946 to improve its system. Josip Broz Tito, a major communist leader who generated his power during World
War II, created this system for Yugoslavia. Tito allowed the creation of six separate republics. These republics were based on ethnic identities and granted minority groups, such as the Croats and Slovenes, more autonomy. This adjustment, also known as “strategic nationalism,” avoided a highly centralized, Serbian-dominated state that existed before World War II.¹⁴

Tito's decision to allow Yugoslavia to run as a federalist regime relates to a policy known as integration. Rather than dissuading a population's culture or ideologies, integration permits various cultural differences to sustain within a state.¹⁵ This process showcases how during the twentieth century, “States developed a variety of political mechanisms to accommodate national diversity with their borders, including legal recognition of minority nationalities.”¹⁶ Tito ultimately felt the use of federalism could appease people's concerns by extending political participation in separate republics and reducing Serbian dominance.

**Yugoslavia's attempt at federalism: How decentralization can ruin a state**

Although Tito attempted to appease Yugoslavia's peoples, the incorporation of federalism resulted in controversy. During the post-World War II era, there was a concern that Yugoslavia would be taken over by the stronger Italian and Hungarian regimes.¹⁷ Less developed regions felt forced to become a part of the larger regime. This development caused groups, such as the Bosnians in Serbia, to feel isolated.¹⁸ Additionally, the more elite Serbs believed they did not receive the proper amount of government power. Since they fought for their independence against the Ottomans during the nineteenth century, they thought they should hold more autonomy.¹⁹ Additionally, Vojvodina and Kosovo gained autonomy from Serbia in 1974.²⁰ This event added two more autonomous communities, further decentralized Yugoslavia's government, and left the Serbs even more dissatisfied.

Tensions between Serbs and non-Serbs grew from 1961-1971. During this period, the number of people living within Yugoslavia's borders who identified as “Yugoslav” decreased. Different ethnic groups, such as the Bosnians, chose to instead identify as “Moslem Bosnians.”²¹ This shift in terminology showcases an increase in separation among Yugoslavia's population during this decade. The constitution of 1974 attempted to reduce tensions between the non-Serbs and Serbs over their views of federalism. Tito instituted the use of an eight-person “collective presidency” to represent the six republics and two autonomous regions.²² This trend increased federal policies, since government responsibilities were granted to the republics.²³ Yugoslavia's minorities in different republics felt frustrated because “politics in the governments of the republics and autonomous regions was increasingly identified with the majority of dominant ethnic group.”²⁴ This effect caused more identity fragmentation in Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia collapsed during the early 1990s. One reason was that many ethnic
groups wanted separate, homogeneous states, rather than a larger multi-ethnic one. According to a study done by Dusko Sekulic, Garrth Massey, and Randy Hodson,

Self-identification was measured by answers to a question asking the respondents’ national identification. Most people answered Croat, Serb, Moslem, or some other nationality. In 1985, in Croatia, 10.6 percent of respondents responded ‘Yugoslav’; by 1989 this figure had dropped to 9.0 percent. In Serbia it was about 4.6 percent.

There were several reasons for the lack of using the national identity in these regions. Economic disparity played a large role. Croatia and Slovenia had higher levels of industrialization than other states. They built their economy at a much faster rate than regions that still heavily relied on agriculture. This difference in ability increased tensions among groups because the richer regions did not want to pay to help lesser ones develop.

The emergence of civil and military conflicts in Yugoslavia during the early 1990s additionally showed how nationalist fears and hostilities dominated the state. Although Yugoslavia’s shift towards federalism was meant to appease ethnic groups, it proved to be the incorrect tactic for the state. Yugoslavia was ultimately doomed for failure because of its diverse ethnic history, differing visions of federalism, and economic disparities. Its failure showcases how even when a state attempts to divest power to its peripheral regions, decentralization can dissolve a state’s existence. When relating Yugoslavia’s collapse to contemporary decisions being made by the United Kingdom and Spain, it is important to consider its failed legacy.

The United Kingdom

The history of the United Kingdom’s development

Similar to Yugoslavia’s decision to integrate various cultural identities to form a more central power, Great Britain began to dominate peripheral states in the “Celtic system” during the mid-sixteenth century. The “Celtic system” was composed of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In these regions, the population spoke Gaelic and practiced different religions from the English. The English attempted to Anglicize these Celtic regions in order to promote economic development and nationalism.

After the Reformation, England gained a higher level of sovereignty through the nationalization of the Church. England’s strong Protestant culture provided the essential stepping-stone towards increasing nationalism and dominating the Celtic nations. England first annexed Wales under the Act of Union in 1536.
King Henry VIII of England seized Wales because “it represented an obstacle to the full development of the internal security of England since it was a land where law and order was in short supply.” The Marcher lords, who dominated the politics of Wales, agreed to this union because they wanted to attract English capital. During this time, Wales was evolving as a major mining center. It was common knowledge that London was the center for “all British commercial transaction.” By working and trading with the English, the lords knew they could stimulate the Welsh economy and improve its mining market.

Great Britain finalized the Union with Scotland in 1707. This unity established Scotland as a part of Great Britain and, similar to Wales, connected these states’ governance systems. It additionally “led to the creation of a single parliament, based in London that would cover the United Kingdom.” James II, Scotland’s king at the time, saw it in his country’s best interest to accept this unity to protect his country’s economic structure and maintain cordial relations with the English. One major burden that the English Parliament utilized against the Scottish was the threat to halt all of their exports into England if they did not adhere to this new ruling. This pressure caused the Scottish to accept Great Britain’s domination.

The English ultimately completed the Irish Union in 1801. They had an interest in Ireland beginning in the early seventeenth century because it provided them with a great amount of land. As the English spread their influence in Ireland, they forced natives away. This caused war to wage between the Catholic Irish and Protestant Englishmen. By the end of the eighteenth century, the English government declared that “its Irish Protestant counterpart was incapable of maintaining any semblance of order and hence tried to arrange for the same kind of union which had so successfully, to that time, integrated both Scotland and Wales.” The English’s ultimatum that the Irish were not capable of managing their own government system was a major reason that they established supremacy.

When the English overtook Wales, the monarchy held a great deal of power in the United Kingdom. However, Parliament became a much stronger force by the time it overtook Scotland and Ireland. In his work, Brendan O’Leary argues, “Nationalism exists and will persist because it is a necessary component even of mature industria; and is expressed perhaps especially acutely in the more representative and democratic political systems.” As the English government’s focus on parliamentary rules and industrialization expanded, it felt it had to increase its central power over less developed nations.

The United Kingdom’s relationship between center and peripheral regions

The rise in English control over the Celtic territories resulted in both political and cultural changes. One positive aspect of this integration was that
the peripheral nations gained access to advanced agricultural devices. This technology assisted the Celtic nations to increase their productivity. Although these advancements assisted the Celtic regions’ efficiency, they were expected to develop economic systems that did not compete with the English system. Their economic dependence rose after the English established a higher level of control over them. Due to this increased dependence on the English system, the Celtic countries’ abilities to promote their own economic values decreased.

In addition to economic dependence, the Celts’ political systems changed as they integrated with the English. The loss of sovereignty in the Celtic lands resulted in the development of political dependency upon England and a loss in their cultural practices. Members of the gentry, or the upper class in the peripheral nations, attempted to follow the English customs and accept the changes that the English had imposed upon them. These people increased tensions among the Celtic population and caused the Celts’ cultural influence to fade. When analyzing the exposure the British utilized against the Celtic nations in both economic and political realms, it is clear that the British were focused on creating a more homogeneous population.

Maintaining a common order within a country is not a simple feat when integrating peripheral groups with its core. According to Hechter, the fact that “peripheral regions continue to define themselves in cultural terms, as being ‘Welsh’ or ‘Scottish’ as against ‘British,’ challenges the generality of the diffusionist model of core-periphery interaction.” Although there was a central government system, the Scottish, Welsh, and Irish all felt as if their ethnic identities were insignificant. This effect caused antagonism between these powers for centuries. To counteract these relations, the United Kingdom began to devolve its power in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland in the mid-1900s.

The Rise in Devolution in the United Kingdom: the Case of Scotland

The United Kingdom has maintained its central governance system since it established control over Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. Beginning in the second half the twentieth century, however, threats to this central governance system have increased. According to John Loughlin,

> The United Kingdom is definitely unitary in the sense that the traditional locus of sovereignty is the Westminster Parliament, although there is a high degree of administrative decentralization especially with regard to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

The United Kingdom began to decentralize its government in the second half of the twentieth century to reduce tensions between Westminster and Wales’
Northern Ireland’s, and Scotland’s government systems. Wales gained a level of autonomy with the implementation of the Welsh Assembly in 1998.\textsuperscript{48} Although the creation of this governing body granted the Welsh a level of autonomy, they were not allowed to create laws without Westminster’s approval. The Welsh system is still very integrated because it has “lacked any widespread tradition of being treated as a separate administrative unit.” Westminster showcased further devolution in Northern Ireland and Scotland during the second half of the twentieth century.

The United Kingdom established Northern Ireland as one of its provinces in 1922.\textsuperscript{49} This relationship led Northern Ireland to face subjugation for decades. One source of tensions was the differences in religion between the Protestant Englishmen and Scots, and the Catholic Irish. After decades of hostility between followers of these two faiths, the Provisional Irish Republican Army emerged in 1969. This terrorist organization used violence against the British to showcase their anger over the persecution they faced.

They advocated for Irish nationalism and separation from Westminster.\textsuperscript{50} In 1998, the British implemented the Good Friday Agreement with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to reduce these issues.\textsuperscript{51} This agreement acted as a peace process between the British and the Irish. One method to instill peace was the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly. This organization permitted Northern Ireland to enact primary legislation.\textsuperscript{52} Ultimately, Westminster was more inclined to devolve its power to Northern Ireland than Wales because of the evident hostility.

Scotland has always maintained a level of separation from the United Kingdom’s politics. Even though James II agreed to the Act of Union in 1701, a “civic tradition of ‘Scottishness’” remained in the country.\textsuperscript{53} In 1885, the Scottish Office was established. This created a form of self-government for the state, in which the Secretary for Scotland supervised the nation’s policies.\textsuperscript{54} This secretary had previously been in charge of managing Scotland’s policies related to Westminster. The Secretary’s duty was now to focus more on Scottish social policies. Although Scotland was under the British Parliament’s jurisdiction, the Scottish Office’s establishment showed that the country wanted autonomy for over a century.

This movement increased during the twentieth-century. In 1934, the Scottish National Party was founded.\textsuperscript{55} This group’s major goal was to ensure that Westminster was aware that the Scottish wanted an autonomous political system. Calls to autonomy were furthered during the 1970s when Scotland discovered oil and gas in its territory in the North Sea.\textsuperscript{56} The Scottish National Party felt that with the accumulation of these resources, the nation could become economically independent. Parliament’s Conservative leaders did want to accept Scottish devolution. Margaret Thatcher, for example, “swiftly adopted a hostile
stance to any talk of diminishing the role of Westminster” in 1975. Although Conservatives in Westminster opposed devolution, it was granted to Scotland on September 11, 1997. This decision gave Scotland its own Parliament and permitted the country to create primary legislation. Although Scotland’s Secretary of State still reports to Westminster, the creation of this governing system showcases how the United Kingdom’s central government gave peripheral regions more independence during the 1990s.

The implications of Scottish devolution: How this shift has increased Scotland's desire for independence

The United Kingdom’s decision to devolve its power over Scotland has increased its government’s desire for independence. The Scottish National Party has advocated for secession for several reasons. Firstly, it claims that the Scottish government would like to shift towards more socially democratic economic principles, rather than support English neoliberalism. Scotland also wants to increase its economic abilities. In the North Sea, there are significant oil deposits that the country could use to advance its economy. Desires for more political autonomy, separate ideological values, and economic independence are all fueling Scotland’s population desire to secede.

On September 18, 2014 Scotland’s population voted on whether they should separate from the United Kingdom. Although there were potential positive aspects for the country, the population ruled that there are more negative economic implications. For example, most foreign investors would view this shift in governance with uncertainty and be inclined to transfer their accounts to banks with the United Kingdom. Additionally, the Scottish are depending on the North Sea’s finite resources to stimulate their economy. This economic specialization makes Scotland much more liable for failure. This potential burden is also great because if Scotland were to remove itself from the United Kingdom, it would have to regain a spot in the European Union. This would ultimately cause the state to have to create a separate monetary system from both the United Kingdom and the European Union. Not only would this be a harsh process for the Scottish government, it would make trade between other European countries and Scotland quite complicated. These economic concerns make Scotland’s independence risky.

Although the United Kingdom made efforts to devolve its power and permit Scotland to act as a more independent state during the 1990s, these shifts have pushed it towards creating a country that wants independence. Scotland denied the move towards secession in 2014. However, due to its only increasing autonomous ability, it is possible that the country will still separate from the United Kingdom.
Spain’s Establishment of a Federal System

The establishment of Spain’s governing system:
From Ferdinand and Isabella to Francisco Franco

Territorial tensions have plagued Spain since King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile united their kingdoms at the end of the fifteenth century. These Catholic monarchs established supremacy over the Muslim-dominated kingdoms of Granada, Naples, and Navarre in the Iberian Peninsula. This religious domination, also known as the Reconquista, was completed in 1492 under the Treaty of Granada. Their control led to the “establishment of a monoconfessional society.” Catholicized supremacy was then implemented. Ferdinand and Isabella sent royal officers to these towns to act as, “representatives of the central government, the defenders of its rights, claims and missions.” These controls caused civil wars to break out throughout the territories for centuries. These disputes were handled by shifting Spain’s governing system in later centuries.

The Constitution of 1812 created a constitutional monarchy for Spain. Through the implementation of this governance system, the government’s control that had dominated the country for centuries was reduced. Local towns were granted their “own municipal governments” which were still expected to report back to parliamentary control. Additionally, it provided universal male suffrage and freedom of the press. Although these tolerant policies made Spain more liberal, these efforts were reduced at the start of the twentieth century.

During Francisco Franco’s dictatorial regime beginning in 1939, he ordered a decrease in Spain’s localized governances’ abilities. These local governments were seen as “direct agents of the central regime,” rather than systems that could act as separate societies. He was concerned with regions that displayed high levels of linguistic differences. For example, he focused on putting an end to the “Catalan problem” where this region’s wishes to secede from Spain were quite high. Franco additionally attempted to increase Spanish homogeneity, as Ferdinand and Isabella had done at the end of the Reconquista. He acted as a ruthless leader who supported the extermination of Jews. Franco’s regime showcased a strong focus on centralization, in which he wanted a strong, nationalistic Spain.

The introduction of federalism to Spain:
How Spain’s central and peripheral regions interact

Although Franco focused on centralization during his rule, his efforts failed upon his demise. In December 1978, Spain created another Constitution. After this document was passed by the Spanish government an “Estado de las Autonomias” was established. This government system was inspired by,

The culmination of extended debate and regime reform that built on the traditions of autonomy represented in the Constitution of 1812, the short-lived
federal First Republic in the 19th century, and the regional autonomy movement of the Second Republic of the 1930s.74

Autonomous communities were granted a series of rights. For example, they gained control over their own health and education systems.75 After facing years of dictatorship under Franco's regime, the Spanish government was focused on incorporating a system that would appease its people and provide liberal policies.

The Spanish Constitution lays down many rules to promote “a highly intergovernmentalized system of local, regional, state, and European level relations.”76 Similar to the United Kingdom’s system, Spain uses an asymmetrical level of power. Spain’s central government in Madrid holds a higher level of supremacy over regional systems. For example, the Constitutional Tribunal, a national form of law, extends the central government’s power nationwide to autonomous communities. An example of this ability includes handling disputes between autonomous communities and the country’s central government.77 Additionally, when the central government sees that an autonomous power has implemented an unjust law, it has the ability to intervene.78 These rights limit autonomous powers’ abilities, but assist in maintaining the country’s stability.

When comparing the United Kingdom’s government with Spain’s federalist system, there are several differences. One differentiating part is that the Constitution grants Spain’s autonomous communities a much greater level of separate authority than the United Kingdom granted its Celtic states. For example, local governments take legal issues to their regional government, rather than to the central government.79 If the legal issue becomes more exacerbated, it can then be discussed at a national level. Also, the use of autonomous communities in Spain showcases that the country recognizes its population’s “ethnic geography.”80 As discussed earlier, Spain’s population has historically rebelled against the implementation of centralized polices and has wanted their separate identities recognized. The federalist system implemented by the Constitution of 1978 provides this recognition.

Along with the implementation of autonomous communities came the creation of sectoral conferences.81 These meetings bring Spain’s regional governments together to plan funding for joint projects, share information between central and regional governments, and create decisions that the Spanish government may discuss with the European Union. This process is different compared to how the United Kingdom chose to integrate the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish. Although these states certainly hold a level of autonomy, Spain provides its regions with more independence. Federalism has appeased a great deal of Spain’s population, but there are several regions in the country that are requesting secession. These concerns relate a great deal to Scotland’s aspiration to separate from the United Kingdom.
Threats to Spanish stability: the case of Catalonia

Reasons behind Spanish regions’ desire to secede: A focus on Catalonia

Catalonia’s population has showcased how it no longer wants to be connected to Spain’s central government. Since the 1950’s the idea of “Catalanism” has existed. People who support “Catalanism” are focused on achieving self-government and helping to modernize Spain as a whole.

A major reason Catalonia is pushing for secession is that it gained autonomy much faster compared to many of the other regions when the Spanish Constitution was created. It, along with the Basque Country, Galicia, and Andalusia, was labeled as a “nationality.” This granted Catalonia autonomy right away, while other regions had to request this right. They then had to wait five years before they could establish autonomy. As a result, Catalonia feels as if it deserves to be looked at separately from the other autonomous countries in Spain. Additionally, Catalans are frustrated because their economy is superior to other Spanish regions. For example, the Catalan economy is more industry-focused than Andalusia. This issue of economic disparity relates to how Croatia and Slovenia felt they deserved more autonomy than other autonomous regions in Yugoslavia because of their economic superiority. Clearly, differences in economic abilities can cause powerful regions to feel frustrated in federalist states.

Catalonia’s drive towards secession increased in 2008 when the economic crisis in Europe broke out. This crisis severely harmed the Spanish economy. Many regions looked to the central government for bailouts. As a part of the federalist system, Spanish regions use an “equalization mechanism.” This requires each region to pay the central government a tax to ensure that it can help regions that may face high debt levels. These taxes fluctuate based region’s economic success. In 2010, it was reported that Catalonia was paying 23 percent above the mean and over-distributing its resources to assist other Spanish regions. This fact greatly angered Catalonia’s population and increased its people’s desire to secede.

Catalonia’s language represents another reason why its population wants to separate from Spain. Catalonia uses a different dialect, known as Catalan, than the rest of Spain. It is reported that “its language is used by about eight million, known by ten million and widely spoken at all levels of society.” This linguistic difference is an inherent part of Catalonia’s culture and demonstrates why it sees itself as very different compared to the rest of Spain. Catalonia’s desire to split relates a great deal to how Yugoslavia’s separate ethnic groups wanted to identify with each other.

The Basque Country has also exhibited efforts to separate from Spain. Its nationalist sentiments have existed since the late eighteenth century. Similar to the IRA in Northern Ireland, a terrorist group known as the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, ETA, arose in 1958. The ETA advocated for separation from Spain's
central government. To showcase their hostility against Franco’s centralized government system, the ETA used guerilla warfare. Upon Franco’s demise, and into the 1960s-1970s, the ETA fell as Spain moved towards a more federalist system. Although this terrorist group is not as pertinent today in the Basque Country, nationalist sentiments still plague the region because many feel their economy is superior to the rest of Spain. They also want to ensure that their dying dialect persists. Although Catalonia and the Basque Country act as autonomous communities underneath Spain’s federalist system, calls for independence continue to dominate these regions.

According to data provided by the Spanish Ministry of Territorial Policy, there were plans for thirty-eight Sectoral Conferences to meet and discuss a broad range of national policy concerns in 2012. These conferences were meant to unite the Spanish regions on national concerns. However, it was reported that the majority of them barely met once during this year. This statistic showcases how autonomous communities, such as Catalonia and Basque Country, are not concerned with maintaining a strong, national Spain. Although Spain is a federalist state, the fact that these communities are unwilling to work with other Spanish regions showcases that this state’s government may collapse.

Potential consequences of Catalonia’s secession towards Spain

Although there is a degree of autonomy in a federalist state, Catalonia could implement its own public policies and design its own institutions without the central government’s approval if it were to secede. This political power is appealing to Catalanian nationalists. However, the economic risks of secession could harm Spain.

If Catalonia gained independence, a concept known as the “Border effect” could occur. This effect describes a decrease in trade between Catalonia and Spain. It is estimated that “the secession of Catalonia would produce a reduction of 3.3 percent of the joint GDP of Catalonia and Spain, consisting of 9 percent decrease in Catalan GDP and 2 percent decrease in Spanish GDP.” Although these figures do not seem outstanding, the long-term effects of decreases in trade between Catalonia and Spain could harm both of these entities’ economies. This form of market fragmentation may put labor or service markets at risk for failure. Additionally, because Catalonia is one of the strongest regions in Spain, it is essential that the country focus on maintaining governance over this region to function as a strong state. Without Catalonia, the country’s overall economic value could deteriorate.

Another potential issue if Catalonia secedes is similar to one that resonates in Scotland. If it were to declare independence, it would then have to decide whether it wanted to continue to be a member of the European Union. Without being a member of this union, foreign investors would not be as willing to maintain
relations with Catalonian banks. Additionally, Catalonia would no longer use the Euro as its form of currency. This could cause its currency to face devolution, making the potential for debt to skyrocket. If Catalonia chose to separate from Spain, it would not have the security from Spain to assist in bailing out this region from a debt crisis. Even though Catalonia has a strong economic system, it would be risky for this region to fully depend on itself.

In 2014 a referendum was voted on by Catalonia’s population to discover the overall thoughts of how it would react to gaining independence. Over 80% of the population voted that they would approve of independence. Although it is clear that this region supports secession, Catalans must consider the potential negative economic circumstances of independence.

How is the European Union dealing with regionalization?

Scotland and Catalonia’s desires for secession are not new concepts. Similar aspirations were recognized by the European Union with the implementation of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. This legislation acknowledged that Europe might evolve into a “Europe of the regions” because of decentralized government systems in states like the United Kingdom and Spain. It ultimately led to the creation of the Committee of the Regions in 1994. Many scholars positively noted that this committee provided a way for decentralized agents within the European Union to have a bigger part in decision-making and consensus building. Although the Committee of the Regions gave regions a greater sense of recognition, such a system complicates regional organization and how to analyze national-state laws. Europe has faced a great deal of stress while attempting to create a system that will function well with regionalization. Throughout the past decade, several pieces of legislation have been created to improve this system.

One major treaty that was created to improve the European Union’s governance system is the Treaty of Lisbon. This treaty was constructed in 2009. It allows European Union law to coexist with member state law. Additionally, it permits regions to have access to European structural funds and fights discrimination against minority regions in member states. Although this treaty has attempted to alleviate issues in the European Union, the power it has devolved to its member states’ regions has caused them to see these as opportunities to gain independence. These aspirations have been evident in the cases of Scotland and Catalonia.

The Treaty of Lisbon’s support for a decentralized Europe displays several disadvantages. For example, a member state in the European Union can maintain its membership, even if one of its territories chooses to secede. However, the territory must then apply for membership. This process can be lengthy and reentry is not guaranteed. There is also a question of legality when considering
the secession of regions from their states. According to European Union law, there is an option of a possible but much disputed right to “remedial secession” but only as a means of last resort to counter the oppression of a minority population—a case that is not congruent with the situation of European sub-national entities, which are democratically entitled and socially and economically protected polities.¹¹³

Catalonia and Scotland are requesting secession to increase their supremacy and abilities, but not because of human rights violations. It is therefore questionable whether such secessions would be accepted.

The Treaty of Lisbon has attempted to improve relations between Europe’s regions with their member states and the European Union. It has followed a similar method to countries that have implemented decentralization. Although these efforts have attempted to grant regions a greater say in decision-making, supporting decentralization has caused such entities to aspire to secede. Such secessions can lead to monetary issues, as well as a decrease in stability in the European Union. Rather than supporting decentralization, the European Union must make strides towards creating a more centralized and universally accepted governance system.

**Conclusion**

Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom, and Spain all used internal colonialism to bring peripheral regions and their core agents together. These processes varied, but it is evident that each system brought these populations together and established a centralized state. Due to cultural, economic, political, and linguistic disparities, their governments were forced to shift to recognize these differences. Yugoslavia and Spain both chose federalist government systems to appease their peripheral regions, while the United Kingdom devolved its government. Although such shifts were used to provide a more equitable system, they have led regions to seek greater independence.

Yugoslavia’s failure displays this phenomenon perfectly. Although Tito created a federalist state to attempt to decrease Serbian dominance, this effect led the country’s peripheral regions to seek further independence. Yugoslavia was then torn apart in the 1990s. The United Kingdom and Spain similarly permitted decentralization to provide more sovereignty to their regions. Although these two countries still exist, their regions are requesting further independence. This is evident when analyzing the rebellious histories of Scotland and Catalonia. Both of these regions used referendums in 2014 to discover how much of their populations wanted to secede. Although both regions have not declared independence, it is evident that they are greatly considering separation. Such an effect could lead these countries to face decreases in trade, high levels of debt, and the rigorous and uncertain process of reentering the European Union. Although
decentralization can appease tensions for countries that have high levels of heterogeneity and rebellious regions, this shift in governance can lead to negative outcomes. It is ultimately the duty of states to provide more centralized systems to evade the possibility of increased regionalization and to maintain a stable, strong European Union.
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