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Research Report

Retaining the Periphery: Strategies of Metropolises in the Struggle Against Secession
(A Comparative Study of Strategies for Territorial Retention)

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Abstract: This study examines what tools and devices metropolises use to keep territories under their control and creates a framework by using previous contemporary successful secession cases to understand what common traits lead to secession. The importance for this research is based on the treatment of colonial states on their overseas territories; many civilizations suffer under colonial rule, whether that be because of the state ignoring the needs of the territory, or attempting to displace them and have the land available for other uses. This research seeks to spread awareness of these disputed territories (their history, their present context, and the populations who are too often ignored due to small size or intentional efforts to keep them out of global scrutiny) and to reveal the lasting effects of colonialism on these communities.

This research contributes to a small, yet emerging, sector in research conducted on independence movements by mainly focusing and placing emphasis of the way in which the state retains the territory. This research uses qualitative data analysis to create a framework, which then is used to derive which qualities are most essential to a successful independence movement, before undertaking its case studies on the Chagos Archipelago, Western Sahara, and New Caledonia to understand which state retention tools are the most popular contemporarily, and especially in territories with longstanding independence movements. The research found that successful independence movements require unity, external support, and legitimacy, while states rely on a mix of repression, law, resources, and geopolitics to hold territories. Looking ahead, this research should be extended by applying the retention framework to new cases, testing which strategies endure over time, and examining how shifting geopolitics and international law may open or close paths to independence.

*I will switch between American English and Canadian English in the duration of this paper, as I was educated in both school systems ☺ Happy reading!

Introduction:

*“Future historians may call our era ‘the age of secession.’ It may become ‘the age of wars of secession.’ – Allen Buchanan, *The Age of Secession*.*

The international-legal concept of ‘country’ had remained vague under UNGA Resolution 1541, defying self-determination, sovereign rights, and territorial integrity of aspiring states, which justifies the continued colonial governance as of the world today. It is now more than ever critical to broach and research disputed territories. As the processes of globalization and decolonization increasingly intersect, it offers a unique opportunity to evaluate the renewed viability of independence movements, explaining its complexities in an evolving global landscape. The goal of this paper is to investigate how governance and social systems are expressed through legislation shape the causes of independence movements, towards effective political transition within the given legal-political framework, to foster equitable outcomes in the pursuit of self-determination¹.

Firstly, this study examines territorial claims in non-sovereign and sub-national jurisdictions, an understudied area in contemporary colonial research on sub-state actors. It analyzes state formation, decolonization, and self-determination through the experiences of oppressed peoples, thereby raising awareness for marginalized communities in their struggles with colonial legacies. The topic of independence movements inherently challenge the developmental and institutional processes imposed by the state, raising questions about governance, public policy, dependency dynamics, social justice, resource exploitation, and ecological sustainability. Therefore, as Isiah Berlin’s proverbial “fox,” this study combines the disciplines of international relations, comparative politics, and law, represents the respective units of analysis for the international, state, and social levels of struggle. Furthermore, this paper attempts to broach the topics of self-determination from a third-dimensional perspective, by analyzing given movements through its social networks, such as culture, media, and organization, to be applied to the respective socio-political and economic context.

Secondly, this study examines how internal governance shapes sovereignty and impacts citizens’ identities, challenging the orthodox view on non-self-governing entities—that is against the notion that sub-sovereign status is often the best option for microstates. The paper explores the denominations of the state into its constituent composition, that is its contiguous and non-contiguous territories, states, and/or provinces. Furthermore, the research critiques the homeland-external dynamic that sustains colonial dependency, exploring challenges to self-determination, particularly why independence referendums often fail, and providing an uniform study on independence movements through a legal perspective.

¹ NOTE: Self-determination and secession are not synonyms; self-determination is the process by which a country determines its own regions’ statehood and forms its own allegiances and government, where the government still has a stake in its disputed territories’ autonomy and governance. Secession is the ultimate level of self-determination where the territory detaches itself absolutely from the state and becomes its own country.

Therefore, it is imperative to conduct further, more extensive investigation into the unique phenomenon of disputed movements, as global efforts into de-colonization continue to help affected communities. Many independence territories are still struggling under the effects of colonialism, where the metropole (the parent state of a colony) uses the land for profit or geopolitical advantage, leaving many citizens to struggle under these effects, including displacement and resource scarcity. Given the longstanding claims to independence in the following territories of Western Sahara, Chagos Islands, and New Caledonia, as well as the negative aftereffects that colonization has caused them, this research will be adopting these three territories as a case study. The broader implications of the research are that it serves as a basis for future research into non-self-governing entities, formalized through political institutions in the contemporary context of independence struggles. Secondly, this research investigates public policy through studying electoral systems and state transition by analyzing past experiences of decolonization, and provides alternative policy-making considerations for equitable social development in the future.

The hypothesis coming into this research is the following: states retain their overseas territories by either (a) military use and/or (b) use of legislation to satisfy claims for independence.

Section 1: Overview into independence movements

1.1 Analysis into separatism movements

The current theories of secession mostly concern themselves with the moral qualities of movements, whether secessionism should be viewed positively, or negatively, or if it should be determined by the movements' goals and aims. The base arguments between scholars on when secessionism is valid (such as legitimacy through history, cultural, or ethnic claims) warrants and prompts further conversation in this regard. Successionist movements often bears the question which to what extent is it morally or utilitarian for separatist movements to secede from the national majority (Beran, 1984). This study occupies itself with studying the state's role in controlling independence movements attempting secession, an otherwise important distinction to make in this study. This section discusses the historical perspective of state policy and its effects on disputed territories, where I investigate closely how previous state management and public policy has and continues to affect the disputed territory. Additionally, further sections study the state's role in retaining overseas territory through historical case studies and an integrated framework accompanied by detailed analysis into strategic implications for the state and movement.

1.1.1 How does secessionist interest begin?

Scholars on independence movements have put forward a diverse array of scholarship on the origins of secessionist sentiments, however, most agree on a combination of three factors, that is: political grievances, economic inequality, and ethnic demography/geography (Siroky 2011; Horowitz 1985; Levine 1996). Scholars may disagree based on the number of factors, the distinction between them, and the emphasis on each. For example, Horowitz states that "separatism results from sheer economic interest & group apprehension," but ignores political grievances altogether (Horowitz 1985). On the other hand, Levine describes the origins of secessionist impulses to come from all the conditions mentioned above, as well as what she describes as "institutional changes," or actions that change the institution of or dedicated to a specific disputed territory, including the collapse of colonial rule, the onset of democratization, the collapse of a federal state, or the transition to a market economy (Levine 1996).

In particular Levine argues that “secessionist impulses are conditioned to a very great degree by ethnic geography,” where ethnic groups are preoccupied and divided by an “us versus them” rationale against the greater ethnic makeup of the country concentrate their population in a particular region of the state. These regions oftentimes have political institutions of their own, which is then used to coordinate political activities and mobilize their resources (313). An example that comes to mind is China’s labelling of territories with ongoing independence movements (i.e. Hong Kong, Macau, and proposed to Taiwan) as a “Special Administrative Region (SAR),” a province that possesses the highest degree of autonomy from China's central government, but is still under the jurisdiction of the National People's Congress and its Standing Committee, where they remain capable of enforcing laws for the special administrative regions (Symaniuk et al. 2021). Siroky not only agrees with Levine on the importance and emphasis on ethnic geography, but adds on that secessionist movements more times occur in peripheral regions of the country, in which distance between the metropole and the periphery plays a large role just as the differing demographic composition.

On the other hand, political grievances are often counted as the basis for many explanations of why conflict against the government erupts, leading to an independence movement. Cederman et al. has put forward three reasonings for why conflict with the government erupts: (1) the more representatives of an ethnic group are excluded from state power (I would recognize this also as part of the ethnic demography thought, as its given political grievances is associated with the ethnically regional institutions or policy); (2) the higher their mobilizational capacity is of said group; and (3) the more they have experienced conflict in the past against state forces or the dominant majority of the nation (Cederman et al. 2010). Furthermore, Hewitt has put forward that economic grievances are also a core characteristic of secessionist grievances, which “exist when groups complain of, or make demands for, a change in the distributive system” (Hewitt 1977, 154). Between scholars, debate remains whether economic deprivation increases or decreases the likelihood of secession. Some theorists argue that when economic deprivation occurs, opportunity cost is low in seceding, and so there is less to lose when trying to gain independence. Other theorists argue that impoverished groups also stand to gain the most when remaining inside the state, as opposed to those who lose by exiting (Siroky 2011, 48).

The cross relation between these factors has also been a point of contention between theorists. For example, some claim that ethnic demography and economic inequality have demonstrated a stronger relationship, and a higher probability of creating an uprising (Cederman et al. 2010). Others have discussed that political conditions have been shown to be the driving force within ethnic groups, as ethnic inequality was not enough to drive a secessionist movement. In other words, literature struggles to explain which combination of the three factors is the most likely to cause a claim to independence. Some theorists, namely Cederman et al., have attempted to explain that ethnic grievances through positivist framework, have resulted in too widespread of account to define the origin of any civil conflict, and thereby only leaving political and economic grievances (Cederman et al. 2010).

This research, of course, would suffer if it would not explain other key factors such as state weakness or military power, economic power of the state/other regional actors/rebel groups, and amount of secessionist movements within one single state, Given the nature of these factors, this paper finds them best utilized to explain successful independence, as shown below.

1.1.2 What factors and resources lead to a successful secessionist² movement?

The plurality and robustness of independence movements provide a diverse case study of its organizational structures within the modern, multi-tiered political structures. Different countries have different approaches to the distribution of power between central and local governments, and hence shape the method, organisational structures of the movements, not to mention the mode of struggle depending on the maturity and progress towards statehood (further elaborated in section 1.2).

Key actors:

It can be generalised that secessionist movements typically interact with three levels of actors as it moves towards independence: (1) the parent state, (2) regional actors, and (3) great powers.

The parent state, or metropole as referred to in this paper, can be defined as the state with international-legal recognition of jurisdiction over the territory, which seeks to perpetuate its overlordship thereof. Regional actors are states with influence, or power as defined in realist terms, that can hold sway over the decisions of the parent state, due to its sphere of influence or geographical proximity to the disputed territory. Great powers are states with influence, or power, over the international system, as a product of the comprehensive measure of national power to influence those regional actors and parent state. Great powers change based on the political global context, as will be seen in table 2.1. This section seeks to answer the question: “what factors and resources lead to a successful secessionist movement,” which separates the internal qualities and external influences, that would assist the territories’ strive for statehood.

Firstly, the role of external actors is pivotal to the overall success of a secessionist movement, which, according to Nelson, “if a secessionist movement does not have support of actors in the region, it will not achieve statehood,” (Nelson 2021, 1248). In particular, the author explains that regional actors could support secession by: (1) providing tangible support to the movement or to the parent state, (2) providing diplomatic support for the movement or parent states’ benefit, (3) and/or influencing great power foreign policy in the region.

The regional actor can effectively disrupt the traditional metropole-periphery relationship and ties between parent state and territory. Depending on the national interest of the regional actor, an endogenously inspired movement faces the actor with the decision to either help the independence group or help subdue it in favour of the parent state. As such, limited regional recognition and foreign aid forms part of a crucial step in the process of attaining overall recognition at the international-legal level. It is also important to note that, by prediction, if an independence movement has ethnic ties to an external actor, whether the dominant culture of the populace or the ruling elite class, as opposed to the parent state, the more likely external support will be provided as it establishes a clear connection of interest in favour of the regional actor (Carmen & James 1250).

How do actors decide to help?

² I am aware of the difficulty that comes with having such similar words together, and I deeply apologize. However, both words are essential to explaining this study, and therefore will continue to be used. You have my deepest apologies.

External actors decide whether to support an independence movement largely based on national interest. As international relations theories suggest, states act as rational actors, weighing the potential gains and costs of intervention. This study has found that support is more likely when (1) the territory shares cultural or ethnic ties with the external state, often reinforced by domestic lobbying; (2) intervention provides a strategic or material advantage, such as weakening the metropole, gaining resources, or denying assets to a rival; or (3) the instability created by the movement itself benefits the actor's regional or global strategy. In this sense, the success or failure of independence movements depends not only on internal mobilization but also on whether they can attract external support that aligns with broader geopolitical interests.

Firstly, the attitude of the parent state is one of the most important factors for the success or failure of the secessionist movement. Since, the parent state can legally agree to recognize the movement without further international effort, thereby eliminating the need for both external and internal recognition, such as Sudan and South Sudan diplomatically agreeing to separate after a successful independence referendum (discussed in table 2.1). However, the parent state and regional actors must fear the possibility of setting a precedent by accepting the sovereignty of a disputed territory, and therefore, geopolitics is also a fundamental factor when considering independence on part of the parent state.

However, from a state-centric perspective, the existence of secessionist movements is a de-stabilizing element, both politically and militarily, to the domestic and regional institution and organisation structure. The radical reformulation of identity, dynamics and politics, not to mention the threat thereof, can always lead to conflict. Buchanan argues that secession can undermine democracy, as a “territorially concentrated dissident minority can sometimes use the threat of secession as a bargaining tool to thwart majority rule.” (Buchanan 1997, 302).

For example, the Chechen independence movement during the 1990s had begun as a regional bid for secession, which escalated into devastating and successive wars that both destabilized the global oil trade and the fragile order of nascent states in the Caucasus following the immediate collapse of the Soviet Union. The conflict had fuelled wider fears of weapons proliferation through terrorism, as well as the threat of Islamic fundamentalism spilling over into surrounding nations. Ultimately, Chechnya failed to secure independence, and remained under Moscow's control, since the parent, regional, and great power statuses of Russia prevents any real intervention against its national interest (Russel, n.d.).

On the other hand, authors focusing on military strength of a movement will argue that the stronger a movement is, with respect to its military strength, the more chance it has of establishing its domestic authority and control in their area. Others focus on how states attempt to adopt more state-like features instead of using force. For example, Stewer's piece focuses on how secessionist rebels, in comparison to non-secessionists, provided inclusive goods (education, healthcare) to all the people in the area it controlled in order to achieve independence, which is them performing the role of the state and legitimizing sovereign authority domestically and internationally (Stewart 2018). Additionally, Huang examined the role of diplomacy in creating political capital and found that when rebel groups successfully build external diplomatic ties, they enhance their legitimacy and bargaining power against the parent state as well as create connections with the international community, showing responsibility (Huang 2016). “Diplomacy also boosts rebels' domestic legitimacy by assuring citizens that the group can attract international attention and aid and has the political and organizational tact required to implement overseas missions.”

1.2 Analysis into states' roles in independence disputes

1.2.1. What is the states' relation with the territory?

When dealing with an independence movement, states vary greatly in their treatment and dealing of the situation. Scholars agree on two main approaches for dealing with disputed territories: either through aggressive means where the goal is to stop the movement, including the use of military force or repressive policies, or through more 'considerate' means, which features more gentle and conciliatory practices to retain the territory and positive sentiments. An exemplary demonstration of this can be found in Canada's treatment of the Quebec separatist movement, where in response to separatist pressures, Canada recognized Quebec's distinct society and granted language/cultural protections while keeping it within Canada (Handler 1988). Stein demonstrates further argumentation how the two ends of state action are either a resolution through calling for a peaceful vote for independence, as demonstrated by the failed 2014 Scottish independence referendum, or 'horribly violent movement,' with Chechnya and Russia (Stein, 2016). States have the option to go for either end, or somewhere in the middle.

1.2.2 What do states do to retain control?

According to Peter Krause, counter-secession strategies are featured in a four-level "triangle" formation, in which the state has an opportunity to dismantle (or 'thwart', as used by Krause) secession in a myriad of ways at each step, including political, legal, economic, and military tools.

Krause theorizes that states have eight ways to counter secession: cultural assimilation, administrative organization, civilian displacement, banning secessionist political activity, fragmenting the secessionist movement, economic coercion, violent repression, and blocking international recognition. I propose that these strategies are divided into two by type: violent measures and policy/legal measures. For example, cultural assimilation, through the strengthening of common aspects of the dominant state identity, can be sorted into the policy measures category, since cultural assimilation is done through policies such as the declaration of an official language. On the other hand, economic coercion could be considered a violent act as it is restricting the flow of wealth and resources to these secessionist territories to weaken its movement. Policy and legal measures are done by smaller, more local ruling bodies, such as municipalities or smaller administrative bodies within the government, such as the Ministry of Education implementing one curriculum to be taught in schools around the country, while violent measures are done by the state, such as government sanctions to particular territories.

Cunningham takes on a different approach, where she describes there being two ways for states to respond to separatism: "divide and conquer" versus "divide and concede" (Cunningham 2011). In "divide and conquer" – the classic colonial strategy – the state attempts to foster internal division within the movement, in order to weaken the overall strength of the front. This can be ethnic, religious, or regional in order to fragment the organization. By ensuring that no unified independence movement can emerge, the metropole is able to maintain control. For example, giving one group privileges in administration, and sidelining others, it sows resentment and competition.

In "divide and concede," the state grants limited concessions, like partial autonomy, local representation, or recognition of cultural rights (but especially the creation of institutions or local governance to make citizens of disputed territories feel like they have real political power) to one group or another, with the main idea that a bargained outcome is the end point of a dispute. In 'dividing and conceding' a state has been found to give more

concessions to more divided movements, as it reduces the chance of further claims to independence, as a comparison to unified fronts who all agree that their end goal is secession.

Simply put, dividing and conquering keep groups weak and divided through rivalry, while dividing and conceding manages groups by giving small privileges or autonomy, but not full control. Furthermore, it is important to note that Cunningham's research focused on internally divided separatist movements, or an independence movement who has conflict within the group based on different goals or demands, and which results in a fragmented and non-unified front. However, research shows that most self-determination movements are internally divided. In fact, only about 37% of self-determination movements could be considered unitary actors with one clear leader, which poses a question regarding diplomatic recognition and struggle politics pre- and post-independence.

Lastly, secession movements should not be studied in isolation, as aforementioned, because it often ties into the wider regional politics (Nelson). There are few scenarios in which the parent state might concede independence, which either internal pressure is so much that the state is forced to at least temporarily relieve control, or that sovereignty is backed by another regional actor that it persuades the state the cost of retaking is too much. Furthermore, the Chagos offers a striking example, which the state is granted based on moral, historical grounds, which nothing induces it other than the home state itself, despite the strategic importance of the island to US and UK forces in the Indian ocean.

Section 2: Building a framework

In the 20th century, there have only been 4 successful secessions: Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1993, Kosovo from Serbia in 2008, and South Sudan from Sudan in 2011. This table asks important questions to try and developed a standardized framework, which answers which factors are the most important to successful secession.

Table 1:

| | Bangladesh | Eritrea | Kosovo | South Sudan |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| What strategic, economic, or symbolic value does the territory hold for the state? | Rich agricultural land, major rivers, large population; economically significant to Pakistan, access to Bay of Bengal (Sisson and Rose 2023) | Red Sea coastline (only maritime outlet/prevented a landlocked Ethiopia), port access, strategic location. Fertile highlands and mineral resources, a symbol of national unity (Italian colonized territory) (BBC News 2011) | Historically and symbolically important to Serbia (medieval Serbian heartland), important mining complex (important economic tool) (Frantz 2009) | Oil-rich region; strategic in controlling Nile tributaries, contains the Sudd wetlands and major White Nile tributaries, vast arable lands. Source of revenue for oil and crops (Blanchard 2019) |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| What strategies did the state use to maintain control? | Military repression, political marginalization, restricting Bengali language/culture (Sisson and Rose 2023.) | Military campaigns, forced resettlements, suppression of dissent (BBC News 2011) | Political repression, autonomy restrictions, security crackdowns (BBC News 2012) | Military campaigns, forced displacement, co-optation of local militias (ibid.) |
| How has the state governed or treated the population of the territory? (Divide and conquer? Divide and concede?) | Repression of Bengali identity; centralization of power; divide-and-concede along religion/class, more successfully divide-and-conquer through aggressive administrative and educational restrictions (ibid.) | Harsh military rule; suppression of Eritrean nationalist movements (divide and conquer) (“Eritrea History, Flag, Capital, Population, Map, & Facts Britannica,” n.d.) | Limited autonomy, repression of Albanian majority; some divide-and-concede tactics pre-1970’s autonomy, but after faced with the threat, divide-and-conquer (ibid.) | Neglect and militarized control; ethnic divisions exploited to weaken unity; a mix of the two treatments, more so trading between conquering and conceding to keep repression strong (ibid.) |
| What grievances motivated secessionist or independence demands? (Underlined subjects demonstrates the popular secession grievances). | Linguistic and cultural discrimination, economic exploitation, <u>political exclusion</u> (ibid.) | Political marginalization, religious/ethnic differences, <u>economic neglect</u> (Kendie 2005) | <u>Ethnic discrimination</u> , denial of autonomy, repression by Serbian state (ibid.) | <u>Political exclusion</u> , <u>ethnic marginalization</u> , <u>economic neglect</u> (ibid.) |
| Did external states, organizations (UN, AU, EU), or great powers support or oppose secession (including by helping the metropole)? | <u>Great power</u> of India greatly supported Bengali independence. Soviet Union in turn supported India (and Bangladesh) Great powers of China, USA backed Pakistan’s (metropole) opposition. No role from <u>UN</u> until formal recognition in 1974 (ibid.) | Eritrean rebels received some international sympathy from <u>regional</u> and Cold War (<u>great powers</u>) patrons (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya, the Arab League, Sudan) but limited direct support. China, Soviet bloc, Cuba all supported Ethiopia (Kendie 2005) | Most Western states (US, UK, France, Germany, great powers) supported Kosovo. <u>NATO</u> intervention later; mixed international views on diplomatic recognition before full independence (ibid.) | Some <u>UN</u> and <u>regional</u> attention (independence referendum monitored by Kenya, Uganda, and the US), limited external support until later stages (ibid.) |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Is the territory remote or adjacent to the metropole's core (capital/administrative city)? | Remote, separated by India (East Pakistan) | Adjacent from Addis Ababa; geographically isolated | Adjacent to Serbia's core but distinct | Adjacent, southernmost region of Sudan |
| Was the movement united or divided by ethnic, political, or class differences? | Largely united around Bengali nationalism (ibid.) | Fragmented by religion/ideology but generally united against Ethiopia (BBC News 2011) | Largely united ethnically; some political factionalism (ibid.) | Fragmented along ethnic and political lines, though shared goal of autonomy (ibid.) |
| What was the outcome for the population? | Widespread violence in 1971, mass displacement, eventual liberation war (ibid.) | Long armed struggle, humanitarian suffering, widespread displacement (ibid.) | Repression and violence, but maintained strong Albanian identity (ibid.) | Civil war, humanitarian crises, mass displacement, continuing insecurity (ibid.) |

2.1 Analysis of table 1: Row by row, we see trends emerge that could be used to construct a framework, to what factors are an indicator of a successful independence movement. To begin, all states in this analysis were of some importance or use to the metropole. While most territories are of significance importance to their parent state, these four cases demonstrate additional importance, whether it be through a regional tool such as the Red Sea, or through resources like oil. Thus, we can conclude that the more perceived importance a territory has, the more the metropole will resist its secession. Continuing beyond this claim, we can also assume that more valuable territories will have higher difficulty in attaining independence, as opposed to those territories which are not as valuable. This also leads to my own personal interpretation that less valuable territories will be easy to 'divide and concede', i.e. provide partial concessions such as regional autonomy to keep the territory under their control.

Continuing onwards, all states made use of divide-and-conquer mechanisms to retain the territory, which ultimately failed. A theory regarding this subject is that excessive repression of this style often backfires, creating strong and deep-rooted grievances that strengthen unity within independence movements rather than dissolving them. This table proves Nelson's work on the key factor to a successful independence movement, as each of these successful secessions had extensive help from both great and regional powers. Although, this does not necessarily prove Nelson's thesis that regional powers are the most essential actor for a successful independence movement, since most actors featured here are great powers (as well as international organizations). One can assume that successful independence movements will almost always require external support on its side to counterbalance the power of the metropole.

In all of the 4 successful independence movements, a common baseline was the identity based on ethnic nationalism, demonstrating that a shared struggle and unified mobilization which can significantly improve the chances of international support and recognition.

Table 2:

| Mechanism | Chagos Islands | New Caledonia | Western Sahara |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Military/basing/security leverage | Very strong (Diego Garcia) — primary retention tool | Moderate (French deployments as backstop) | Strong (Morocco military control); external actors (Algeria, US) shape balance |
| Legal/constitutional devices | Domestic BIOT statutes; executive control | Nouméa Accord + special electoral roll; French constitutional supremacy | Moroccan administrative integration; contested legal claims; ICJ opinion supports Sahrawi rights |
| Electoral/franchise design | Not applicable (population removed) | Critical — special roll shapes outcomes | Voter ID & eligibility disputes central to referendum impasse |
| Economic/resource leverage | Fisheries, strategic rents | Nickel revenues, provincial economic networks | Phosphate, fisheries, potential hydrocarbons; resource contracts used as leverage |
| Administrative population engineering | Forced displacement of Chagossians | Long-term settler demographics shifted Kanak minority | Settlement policies and integration of Moroccan nationals in “Southern Provinces” |

2.2: Key findings

This particular essay tests three core hypotheses: (1) states retain control through either basing/military or legislative/administrative means; (2) internal governance shape mobilization and legitimacy of the state and territorial movements; and (3) international legal ambiguity and geopolitics create and reinforce path dependency for state-movement relations, and is a critical fact informing whether a state would choose to maintain or relinquish control. The paper finds that military/basing and legal/constitutional design and constraints are the dominant methods of retaining territories across all the case studies. In particular, the electoral design and resource extraction/redistribution mechanisms are able to mediate between mobilization and legitimacy. Moreover, international legal ambiguity and geopolitical interests produce path dependency of the parent states, reinforcing the claims over the territories and justifying intensifying parent state control. This study confirms all three hypotheses using inputs such as basing, resource importance, electorate rules, diaspora activism, and international legal pressure, as well as a causal chain which combines strategic value, metropole security bargaining, legal/constitutional retention instruments, electoral/administrative mechanisms shaping territorial politics,

movement adaptation (litigation/diaspora diplomacy), international mediation-result (treaty, autonomy, stalemate) (further elaborated in section 3).

In detail and order, the essay finds that the retention mechanisms are multi-modal and case-specific, such as Chagos, which offers a paradigmatic case of military basing and regional geopolitics reinforcing the claim and control of the parent state, the UK and US, whose power status in the region translates into minimal publicity and contestation of these claims in the international forum. The issue of the presence of basing/security arrangements and military presence as an argument is far weaker for New Caledonia and Western Sahara, which the latter's presence of the parent state (Morocco) remains hotly contested. On the other hand, New Caledonia and Western Sahara highlights the legislative and administrative means as a method of suppressing claims of independence, through special electoral rolls and administrative integration of the territory into the parent state. For New Caledonia, the Nouméa electoral roll and franchise design of New Caledonian democracy directly influences voter turnout and legitimacy for future territorial elections and local administration, fuelling separatist claims of election fraud and calls for secession due to a lack of trust in neocolonial bureaucracy. Albeit, out of the case studies, the Chagossian case requires special consideration due to historical displacement which nullified on-island mobilization, forcing diaspora strategies to adapt and pursue tactics that resemble government-in-exile organisational dynamics. Resources also remain a key consideration in secession, which fisheries, mining, phosphate in Western Sahara, nickel in New Caledonia, and aid/rents in Chagos play a large role in negotiations.

Furthermore, as aforementioned, the geopolitics and international legal ambiguity are critical to the issue of secession, which could either perpetuate the issue or resolve it before it reaches a critical force. Given the ICJ ruling on Western Sahara (1975) and Chagos (2019), as well as UNGA Resolution 1541 and subsequent UN decolonisation norms, and Security Council renewals under MINURSO. Albeit legal and international pressure has in turn resulted in minimum changes to the status of these territories, and as such is necessary, but not sufficient as a factor into successful secession campaigns. Though some could claim that Chagos is an outlier, pending recent developments post-formulation of topic and paper, the metropole strategic consideration had taken the form of bilateral bargaining, which the UK-Mauritius 2024-25 talks had produced a stalemate settlements rather than immediate external self-determination outcomes. The advisories and injunctions has produced political momentum — but great-power geopolitics, basing needs, and bilateral bargaining often produce negotiated settlements that prioritize strategic and stability considerations over immediate, full external self-determination, and reflect much more on policy shift than any international consensus (“Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965,” n.d.; “UK and Mauritius Joint Statement, 3 October 2024” 2024).

Lastly, movement dynamics are mediated by internal franchise rules, media ecosystems, resource control and demographic trajectories, which internal administrative organisation and layout shape the means and modes of resistance and struggle. Where franchise rules restrict the electorate (New Caledonia) or population displacement occurred (Chagos), independence movements are weakened electorally and strengthened internationally via legal/diplomatic campaigns and diasporic advocacy. In Western Sahara, the Polisario's struggle combines armed/diplomatic/diaspora channels while Morocco pursues de facto normalization via investment and settlement.

Section 3: Applying framework to Chagos Islands, Western Sahara, New Caledonia

This section expands on the theories previously established in section 1, applying them to the contexts of the respective case studies (Chagos, New Caledonia, and Western Sahara), analysing how metropolises retain effective control in legal, institutional, military/security, economic, administrative, and information domains. In particular, the study warrants an in-depth review of the respective histories of these geographically, culturally, ethnically, and politically diverse territories, revealing and maps the claims and mobilisation of independence movements, as well as enabling an evaluation into the transition designs—whether the thesis design are compatible with prevailing legal doctrine through UNGA, ICJ, and UN norms. The methods combine an interdisciplinary approach, which includes doctrinal legal, comparative institutional design, political-economy, and social movement/network.

3.1 CHAGOS ISLANDS

3.1.1 Overview of the Chagos Islands

1. Sovereignty prior to 2024: BIOT administered by a UK Commissioner under UK domestic law with specialised executive instruments, no representative local legislature, Chagossians were removed and lacked political presence on the islands.
2. Post-agreement architecture (treaty): sovereignty transfer to Mauritius is subject to treaty obligations, preserving the existing basing arrangements (multi-decadal lease/operational guarantees), in exchange for joint commissions for implementation and financial packages (Foreign, Mauritius No. 1.).
3. Primary actors include: the Chagossian diaspora associations (UK/Mauritius), Mauritius government (sovereignty claimant), sympathetic states in UNGA debates, and the UK/US governments.

The Chagos Archipelago (“Chagos”) is a set of islands and atolls in the Indian Ocean, 310 miles (500 kilometers) from its closest human society, the Maldives archipelago. It is 1,250 miles (2,000 kilometers) away from Mauritius. Originally a French territory, hence the spoken language of Chagossian Creole in the territory, the Treaty of Paris 1814 resulted in France ceding their territories based in the Indian Ocean to the United Kingdom, including its Isle de France – presently Mauritius – which had hosted the Chagos administration due to its central location in the spice trade. Chagos would later become the focus of competing claims by various European powers in India and the Indies. The island’s geography itself is unique in that it is a place of astounding natural richness. With an internal lagoon protected by coral from all sides, its 125 square kilometers are home to some of the rarest species in the world only found in the archipelago. Its coral atolls and extensive reefs have diverse flora and fauna that make it one of the world’s largest marine protected areas.

3.1.2 History of the Chagos Islands

1. 1814–1965: UK control, which from 1965, the excision of Chagos from Mauritius and the creation of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) during decolonization process producing the basis for claims and conflict.
2. 1966: UK–US basing arrangement, where the US obtains access to Diego Garcia while the Chagossian population expelled late 1960s–early 1970s for base construction (“History NSF Diego Garcia.”).

3. 2019: ICJ Advisory Opinion — Court concluded separation of Chagos from Mauritius was not lawfully completed and urged UK to end administration (advisory, non-binding). UNGA welcomed and called for UK to cooperate with Mauritius on resettlement. (“History NSF Diego Garcia”; “General Assembly Welcomes International Court of Justice Opinion on Chagos Archipelago, Adopts Text Calling for Mauritius’ Complete Decolonization | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.”)
4. 2024–2025: UK and Mauritius political agreement, since 3 Oct 2024 to issue a joint statement, whereas the treaty was signed on May 2025, and finally UK tables treaty in Parliament 22 May 2025, providing for transfer of sovereignty while securing arrangements for continued basing use (long lease/arrangement for Diego Garcia) and development funds (GOV.UK, “UK and Mauritius Joint Statement, 3 October 2024.”, Foreign, Mauritius No. 1.).

3.1.4 Mechanisms of Retention

1. **Military/basing:** Fundamental leverage of Diego Garcia, since it is a strategic US/UK base, and basing requirement drove UK policy choices and bargaining with Mauritius and US. The UK used basing needs to justify continued administration and control arrangements. (“History NSF Diego Garcia Menu.”, GOV.UK, “UK and Mauritius Joint Statement, 3 October 2024.”)
2. **Legal manoeuvres:** Domestic statutes creating BIOT, denial of effective self-determination mechanisms, use of executive orders/defence prerogatives. The litigation in UK courts produced mixed results before international pressure. A 2019 ICJ advisory and subsequent UNGA votes increased legal costs to the UK, prompting negotiation. (“Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965.”)
3. **Administrative/Population engineering:** Forced removal of Chagossians eliminated local political actors on the territory, and diaspora campaigns persist but had limited on-island leverage.
4. **Economic and financial levers:** Development packages, access to fisheries, and aid conditionality were used in bilateral talks.

3.1.5: Claims and Analysis

The Chagos is a strategic asset for the UK and the US. The Chagos lies between the crossroads of global trade routes and important regional powers, at the centre of the Indian Ocean, balancing the strategies of India and China respectively.

The secessionist claims are unique as it is grounded in decolonization and right of return, reparations, and indigenous rights. The UK had displaced all residents of the island by relocating the population to either the Seychelles, Mauritius, or even to the UK, based on personal choice. This process was in three stages: first, the UK gradually cut off access to Chagossians abroad by claiming that there were no boats available to return to the country; second, a clearing of Chagos in 1969, where those living on Diego Garcia were told that the island was “closed off,” and the population would be forcibly re-located to Peros Banhos or other nearby islands or countries, including Mauritius and Seychelles; third, expansion of containment circle and finalisation of relocation, where those in

relocated islands such as Peros Banhos were also removed, after being told that the territories were also no longer suitable to be inhabited, and that residents must leave by boat to the country of their choice.

The humanitarian and moral grounds of the issue are particularly startling. The abruptness of relocation had resulted in very little notice to residents, and many had left their personal belongings, including house pets—resulting in an uncontrolled stray population post-removal, causing the US a slight, but notable, inconvenience. Furthermore, it would prove to be difficult for Chagossians to form a coherent identity in the wake of their removal, given that most exiles had both the physical distance between their homeland and their compatriots in the respective destinations of relocation. Furthermore, to enforce the international legitimacy of the UK’s territorial control, the UK had undertaken administrative re-organization and international-legal redesignation of the islands, by classifying Chagos as a BIOT. This move had effectively annexed the territory, permanently separating it from Mauritius, where the legitimacy and international recognition of such a designation had been granted under wider regional geopolitics in exchange for facilitating U.S. basing rights.

Yes resistance would persist, albeit unable to disrupt local dynamics, strategies of independence had combined litigation (UK courts), UN advocacy (GA requests for ICJ opinion), diplomatic pressure, and media campaigns, most notably with the assistance of Mauritius (“The Chagos Advisory Opinion and the Decolonization of Mauritius | ASIL.”). Recently, the persistent legal and political pressure on the issue of legitimacy and sovereignty of the island, culminated in the ICJ Advisory Opinion 2019 (requested by UNGA), which had produced a pivotal, reinvigorating momentum, by placing the issue under new light. Although the ICJ Opinion is only legally persuasive and non-binding, it has nonetheless resulted in renewed discussion and publicity for the diaspora. Subsequent UNGA resolutions and diplomatic pressure increased the cost of UK retention, and led to political agreement in 2024–2025, through the UK-Mauritius treaty (2025), which aims to resolve legal claim in exchange for basing guarantees (“Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965.”, GOV.UK, “UK and Mauritius Joint Statement, 3 October 2024.”). However, the treaty had resolved the state-level sovereignty claim (subject to ratification), but has since generated several critiques, that: (1) the Chagossians claim insufficient consultation of the populace themselves and unresolved resettlement timelines results in unpredictability without guarantees; (2) security guarantees for Diego Garcia may limit meaningful control for Mauritius over that island, and hence limit true sovereignty and liberation under UK or US control; (3) the environmental protections and fisheries governance are included but require robust monitoring from third party or external sources (Foreign, Mauritius No. 1., The Week, “What Is the Chagos Island Deal?”).

3.2 WESTERN SAHARA

3.2.1 Overview of Western Sahara

Western Sahara, dubbed “Africa’s last colony” is a disputed, non-self-governing territory to the north-east of Africa, directly below Morocco, to the west of Mauritania, and facing the Atlantic Ocean. Comprised of 266,000 square kilometres of pure Saharan desert, Western Sahara is one of the least populated territories in the world. Moroccan holds de facto administrative control in much of Western Sahara (“Southern Provinces” claimed by Morocco) with Moroccan institutions installed, facilitating regional control and legitimacy of said territorial control. On the other hand, the Western Sahara independence forces, Polisario, governs refugee camps in Tindouf (Algeria) and claims

SADR (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic) with partial recognition by some states. MINURSO’s mandate is stabilization and organizing a self-determination referendum, although progress has been long stalled (MINURSO, “Security Council Resolutions and Statements.”).

3.2.2 History of Western Sahara

1. Pre-1975: 19th century Spanish Sahara colonization, and following the waves of democratisation, a renewed interest in Spanish territories is concluded by the 1975 ICJ Advisory Opinion: Court found no ties of territorial sovereignty sufficient to preclude self-determination by the Sahrawi people, recommending a referendum for self-determination. (“Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975 | INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE.”)
2. 1975–1991: Moroccan military control of much territory after the Green March, and Polisario continues armed resistance. A 1991 UN-brokered ceasefire and creation of MINURSO with a mandate to organize a referendum (which stalled over voter eligibility). (ibid)
3. 1991–2020s: Period of prolonged stalemate, MINURSO continues periodic mandate renewals, and Morocco proposed autonomy plan (2006). Although, Polisario insists on referendum with independence option, and renews hostilities and low-intensity conflict since 2020 since political impasse continues. In 2020 the US (Trump administration) recognized Moroccan sovereignty — a major geopolitical shift. Security Council renewals continue (e.g., S/RES/2756(2024) extending MINURSO to Oct 2025). ([UN Docs](#); AP News, “UN Extends Mandate for UN Peacekeepers in Western Sahara, with Algeria Protesting over Human Rights.”)

3.2.3 Mechanisms of retention

1. Territorial administration & settlement: Morocco integrated territories through administrative and settlement policies, economic development projects (ports, fishing, phosphate, tourism), and investment. These create facts on the ground and change demographic composition.
2. Legal/political instruments: Morocco’s autonomy proposal reframes self-determination as “autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty”. Broad international sympathies sometimes align with Moroccan stability claims, and great-power shifts (e.g., US recognition 2020) give political cover. (AP News, “UN Extends Mandate for UN Peacekeepers in Western Sahara, with Algeria Protesting over Human Rights.”)
3. Security posture: Moroccan military strength and control over main population centers, while Polisario retains armed capacity (hit-and-run) and guerrilla structures, and is supported diplomatically by Algeria and some states.
4. Resource regimes: Phosphate extraction, fisheries, and potential hydrocarbons make resource governance a central leverage point. Foreign companies’ contracts factor into de facto retention (“UN Documents for Western Sahara: Security Council Resolutions”).

3.2.4 Claims and Analysis

The Sahrawians (Arabic for ‘inhabitant of the desert’) commenced their movement and struggle the creation of the Movement for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Wadi el Dhahab in 1969. The intent was to attain the independence of the Saharan territories of Saguia el Hamra and Wadi el Dhahab through peaceful means, such as demonstrations and protests. However, the peaceful protests and demonstrations against Spanish rule had produced violent crackdowns on part of the regime. The violent reaction led the movement to the conclusion that peaceful means would never result in independence, and in turn, floated the idea of an armed revolution. Subsequently, which established the armed wing, Polisario, as an organization aimed at liberating Western Sahara through armed means. The group carried out attacks on different points of the territory, as well as striking at the phosphate mines and transport installations that linked the economic leverage with the harbour.

Polisario Front claims legal right to self-determination based on 1975 ICJ opinion and UN decolonization doctrine, which forms its social base around Sahrawi tribes, based in refugee camp population, and the diaspora. The strategies of secession is through a dual-level campaign, firstly, diplomatic recognition campaign, through UN channels, occasional military pressure. Counter-secession is also well documented, which human-rights advocacy groups have found abuses under Moroccan administration. External advocacy leverages African Union (SADR was admitted as member) and some states’ recognitions. (“Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975 | INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE.”; “UN Documents for Western Sahara: Security Council Resolutions.”). The issue has been previously debated and produced the ICJ 1975 advisory, which strongly supports the Sahrawi right to self-determination. In particular, UN practice and norms (resolutions, Security Council renewals of MINURSO) also recognizes the need for a political solution based on self-determination, but has not yet forced a referendum on the issue in the region. International fragmentation, which some states recognize SADR, while others support Moroccan autonomy, can also be interpreted that the legal framework is contested in practice though firm in doctrine. (“Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975 | INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE.”; MINURSO, “Security Council Resolutions and Statements.”)

3.3 NEW CALEDONIA

3.3.1 Overview of New Caledonia

New Caledonia comprises of several islands in the southwest Pacific Ocean, nearest to Vanuatu (220 kilometers/140 miles southwest), while 1,210 kilometers, or 750 miles east of Australia. The larger, populated islands include the main island of Grande Terre, the Loyalty Islands, the Chesterfield Islands, the Belep archipelago, the Isle of Pines. It is the largest island in the South Pacific after New Guinea (Connell 1987) and has long been valued for both its natural resources and its strategic position in the Pacific.

The islands before being colonized were used as a site for whaling, and later on, “blackbirding,” or the act of taking Melanesian or Western Pacific Islanders from their homes in Pacific islands. The Kanak people represent around 40% of the population. Over time, European settlers as well as migrants from Asia and other Pacific islands created a multiethnic society. Historically, however, Kanaks were marginalized socially, economically, and politically, fueling demands for independence and recognition of their cultural identity.

Geographically, New Caledonia is notable for its extraordinary biodiversity, from its barrier reef, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site to its endemic flora and fauna. Conservation and research efforts have drawn attention globally to the island.

Nouvelle Calédonie: “sui generis” entity under French Constitution with local institutions (Congress, three provincial assemblies). Nouméa Accord froze certain competencies for progressive transfer over 20+ years and created eligibility rules for special electoral roll (LESC) for referenda. French constitution remains ultimate authority, and the constitutional amendment is required for full departure from framework. (“Agreement on New Caledonia Signed in Nouméa on 5 May 1998 - La France En Nouvelle Zélande.”)

3.3.2 History of New Caledonia

1. 1800s: In 1853, the French took formal possession of New Caledonia, and in 1864 the territory turned into a penal colony. From then until 1897, France sent 22,000 criminals and political prisoners to New Caledonia (Aldrich and Connell 1992). Once being granted amnesty, most of the prisoners left New Caledonia to return to France. After finding nickel deposits in 1864, the French imported workers from nearby islands and territories to work the mines, who even after their term expired decided to stay and continue their work in the mines or as shopkeepers. At the time, the French also unsuccessfully tried to encourage European immigration. However, the indigenous Melanesian were almost completely excluded by French control, as few entered the French economy, including as workers in the mine. Plantation economies, popular in similar geographical climates, were also not created. Instead, Europeans farmers settling in New Caledonia brought the demand for land with them, causing Melanesian’s to be confined to reserves on the island. Additionally, the Melanesians were required to provide labour for Europeans and pay taxes, and according to the 1881 “Code de l’indigénat” (“Indigenous code”), they could be fined or otherwise punished, without benefit of a trial, for a large variety of infractions (“Le Code de l’indigénat,” n.d.). This mistreatment, that existed even before the “Indigenous code”, as well as the Europeans bringing over diseases such as smallpox and measles that killed many of the indigenous population, as well as alcoholism, eventually erupted in the large-scale revolution of 1878 and the smaller revolution of 1917. During WWII, New Caledonia was used as an important Allied base, and by 1946, New Caledonia became an overseas territory of France. This meant that New Caledonia began taking steps to strengthening their economy through nickel trade between them and Australia, in exchange for coal vital, and exports of iron ore and timber.
2. 1976-1988: The Events (*Les Événement*) refers to the conflicts between French state forces, European settlers, and the Kanak independence movement, the latter, by extension, the indigenous population. In 1983, a statute of "enlarged autonomy" for the territory was proposed for a five-year transition period and a referendum in 1989. However, in 1984, the Kanak resistance group Front Indépendantiste seized local farms, and in the following year, though the French government offered sovereignty to the Kanaks and legal protection for European settlers, the deal would faltered as violence escalated amongst the groups, and forced the French government to declare a state of emergency. However, the most egregious outrage occurred in March 1986, when the French government began redistributing lands without considering the native land claims, resulting in over two-thirds going to Europeans and less than a third to the Kanaks.

3. 1980s-1990s: As previously established, the disenfranchised indigenous population was left economically destitute and politically alienated. Violent conflict would again erupt between state, settlers, and indigenous population, and, subsequently, is concluded by the 1988 Matignon Accords and 1998 Nouméa Accord established multi-stage transfer process and special electoral roll, which ushered in peace amongst the various actors, but left the issue unsettled until elections at the end of the transition process.
4. 2018-2021: since the referenda under Nouméa Accord, the 2010s had seen progress in reconciliation between the Indigenous population and the state, but the 2021 third referendum was boycotted by pro-independence parties leading to very low turnout and overwhelmingly “No” result to secession. Recent 2023–2025 political crisis are therefore centered on French parliamentary moves to reform the electoral body (2024 unrest). (Nouméa, *New Caledonia*.)

3.3.3 Mechanisms of retention

1. Electoral/franchise architecture: Special electoral roll (LESC) narrows franchise for referenda to long-term residents and those with material links, which produces institutional bias favouring indigenous voice in some ways but also produces disputes when reforms seek to expand electorate. The politics of the electoral roll shape outcomes and legitimacy.
2. Legal/constitutional entrenchment: French state retains constitutional supremacy through the international-legal control of the territory. Albeit, the Nouméa Accord’s multi-stage process created institutional path dependency (three referenda cap).
3. Economic ties & resource governance: Nickel industry central to GDP and flows (foreign capital, French oversight), which ties local elites and non-indigenous communities to metropolitan economic networks.
4. Security posture: French security deployments and capacity to restore order (gendarmierie, military reinforcements during unrest) act as retention backstop. Recent unrest saw use of French capacities (The Guardian, “Null and Void.”).

3.2.4 Claims and Analysis

As aforementioned, the French government has suppressed territorial dispute is through a series of systematic and legal framework, most prominently compiled in “Le Code de l’indigénat:” which “in general, this code subjected Aboriginal and immigrant workers to forced labour, civil probation, requisitions, capitalization taxes on reserves and a set of other equally degrading measures. It was a collection of discretionary measures intended to make the ‘good colonial order’ reign, which was based on the institutionalization of inequality and justice. This code was constantly ‘improved’ in order to adapt the interests of the settlers to the ‘realities of the country’” (“Le Code de l’indigénat,” 1881).

This legal code provides insight into state retention in two ways: first through the constant ‘improvement’ of the code based on contemporary issues that the government dealt with through rewriting the code to prevent anything ‘undesirable’. By constantly changing legality surrounding how the indigenous would be able to act, it kept the population unable to organize and kept them under strict regulations they would not be able to break free from. This

changing voice of the law also was important in the face of rebellions and complaints, to silence the dissatisfaction of the indigenous. I personally classify this action as policy/legality-based state retention.

Additionally, this brief explanation of the code showcases how the French government kept the New Caledonian indigenous economically weak by claiming taxes, as well as preventing them from finding other forms of work apart from forced labor. This kept Melanesian from developing any real kind of income or financial resource and so kept them subservient to Europeans as they were used for forced labour. This no doubt had an impact on the Melanesians' ability to buy from shopkeepers around the island(s).

Other French colonies and New Caledonia were administered by a governor, which meant that requests for a governor-general were ignored. Where a governor represents the monarch or a national government at a sub-national level, the governor-general represents and manages the territory on behalf of the metropole. Because of this, chief executives were changed extremely frequently. Policies were decided in Paris and implemented by colonial officials, leaving little room for any kind of self-management by the Melanesians. Additionally, French focus was settled more on their territories in Africa and Asia, less so on their Pacific territories. This also meant that the frequent request for more development, in New Caledonia specifically, were foregone when in comparison to development and attention on Africa and Asia. This is an example of Krause's 'administrative organization' strategy of state retention, where the changing of internal administrative lines divides the population and prevent the rise of a proto-state, which even despite the requests/demands for a governor-general, would have helped develop New Caledonia.

Pro-independence coalition on the other hand, are dominated by FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front), whose is largely based in indigenous Kanak communities and civil-society alliances. Its claims is built on indigenous rights, land restitution, economic justice, and political autonomy. Strategies of independence include electoral participation, negotiation under Nouméa, protest and (when litigatory channels perceived closed) boycotts. Loyalist parties represent settler or "French" identity and economic interest groups.

4. CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated that the ability of metropolises to retain control over overseas territories depends on a combination of military strength, legal and institutional tools, population management, and the ability to exploit internal divisions within movements. Subsequently, this research has also found that independence movements that combined strong internal unity with external recognition and support were far more likely to succeed, despite the metropole's strategies. Analyzing all 20th century successful independence movements of Bangladesh, Eritrea, Kosovo, and South Sudan illustrates that while repression and divide-and-rule tactics can delay independence, they rarely eliminate the underlying grievances that drive separatism. However, those movements which build legitimacy at home and abroad, through diplomacy, resource mobilization, and/or alignment with great power interests, were ultimately able to overcome the metropole's strategies of control. This suggests that independence struggles are best understood as dynamic interactions between internal cohesion, external support, and state responses.

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