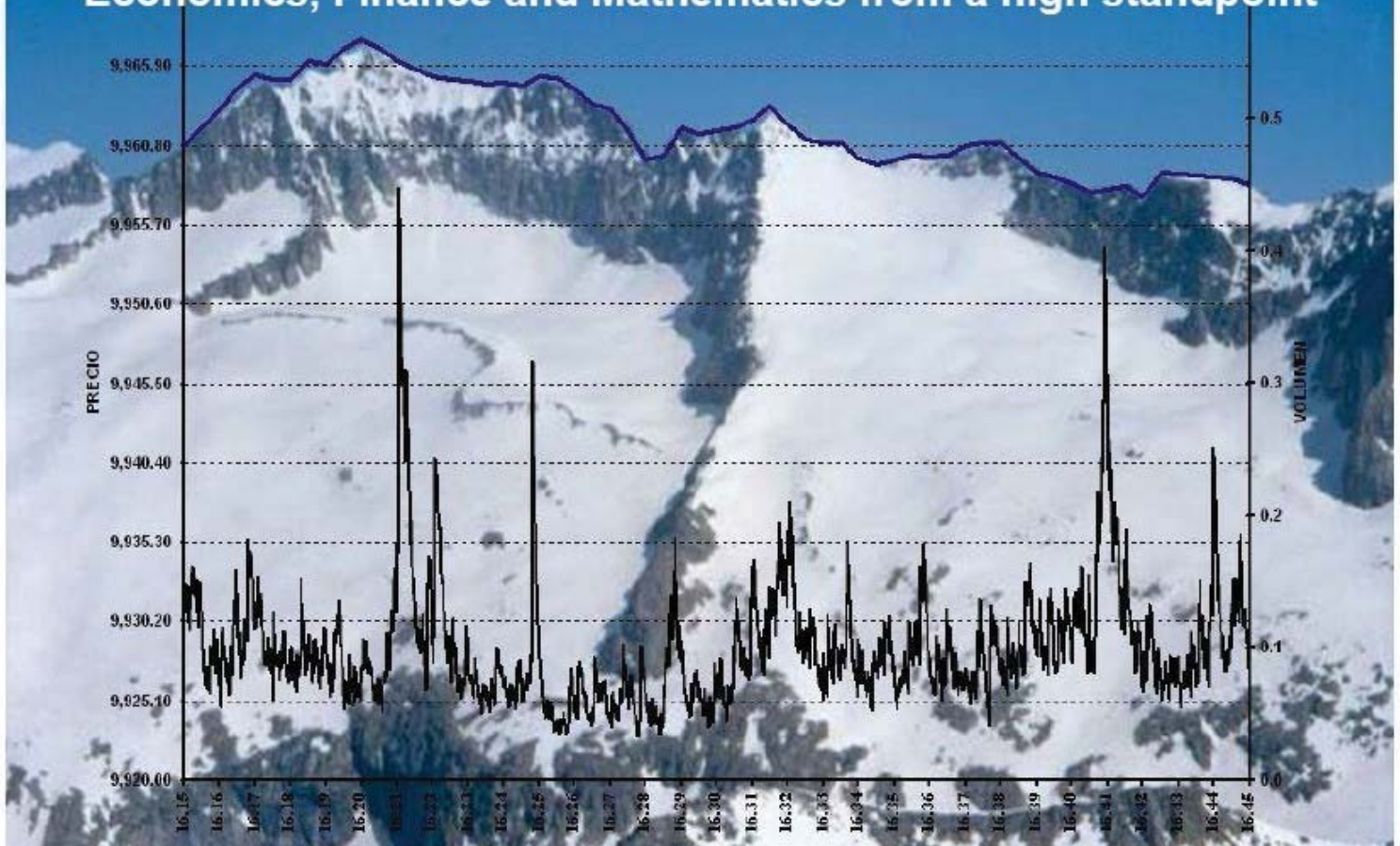


### Economics, Finance and Mathematics from a high standpoint



## Does the secession movement in Catalonia provoke misbehavior in social activities?

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# Does the secession movement in Catalonia provoke misbehavior in social activities?

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## **Abstract**

In October 2017 Catalan citizens were asked to participate in a referendum to decide whether to secede from Spain. The Spanish government did not recognize the referendum a priori. During and after the referendum confrontation between protesters and police forces erupted. This article examines whether the political conflict in Catalonia had an influence on the social behavior of Catalan citizens. The results show that misconducts between the different groups (pro- and against- independence) did neither increase nor decrease before and after the referendum. Even groups that come from starkly different political contexts did not change their behavior towards each other. The results contradict the political notion in Spain that the Catalan secessionist movement has brought confrontation to other daily activities, e.g., leisure. To measure social behavior, we use code violations (misconducts) data from amateur football in Catalonia.

## **KEYWORDS**

Catalonia, referendum, secession, social behavior, Spain

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In October 2017 voters in Catalonia were called to vote in a referendum which decided whether or not they wanted to secede from Spain. The referendum was especially controversial as the Spanish government declared the referendum as illegal. The referendum imposed a challenge for politicians, who have the legal obligation to guarantee the maintenance of the welfare state. Political science literature highlights the difficulties to govern and make decisions due to the interests and risks to which political representatives are exposed (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Thus, in a political separatist confrontation the aims of the parties are mutually exclusive and negotiation is complicated, which generates frustration.

Frustration and negative affective states are two essential causes of violence (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996) and inherent in many secessionist movements. Therefore, the quarrel between the executive part of the Spanish government and members of the secession movement is likely to become more intense. For example, the independence movement of the Basque country (ETA) (Clark, 1984; Sullivan, 1988), of Ireland (IRA) (Cairns & Derby, 1998; Feldman, 1991), or of Yugoslavia (Oberschall, 2000; Wilmer, 2004) all resulted in violent confrontation. However, Sändig and Granzow (2018) notice that non-violent secessionist movements are more effective than violent ones. Recent non-violent secessionist movements have also emerged in Europe, e.g., Scotland, or Catalonia.

In Catalonia the secession movement is not necessarily supported by the whole population (Jones, 2017). Thus, although the movement is non-violent in nature, it might contribute to a tense atmosphere and social confrontation inside Catalonia. Several politicians argue that the secession movement negatively affects the coexistence of citizens with different political ideas in the region. For instance, Inés Arrimadas, the leader of the opposition in the Catalan Parliament since 2015, claims that Catalonia is broken due to the secessionist movement; and there is an evident social conflict that negatively affects interpersonal relations (Cebeiro, 2018). But, do pro- and against- independence groups really change their behavior towards each other in daily life? Little empirical evidence exists, as measuring changes in social behavior is problematic.

In this paper, using sports data, we examine how the social behavior in Catalonia for groups that support secession and groups that oppose secession evolves. The analysis traces the number of misconducts (code violations) in amateur football matches in Catalonia during the period from 2016 to 2018 (i.e., before, during, and after the referendum and subsequent elections in 2017).<sup>1</sup> The political ideology of governments in towns and neighbourhoods, where the teams are allocated, is the explanatory variable.

The Catalan movement has gained widespread popular, political, media, and academic attention (cf., Crameri, 2015; Micó & Carbonell, 2017). These elections are especially interesting as the parties polarized the political campaigns

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<sup>1</sup>The secessionist movement covers a longer period of time, but the data availability limits a more extensive empirical analysis. Still, the extraordinary case of the referendum in 2017 is a point of interest. The vote clearly differed from previous elections in Catalonia and both protests and encounters with police forces were unprecedented in their magnitude in recent political confrontations.

(in favor or against the independence of Catalonia). Moreover, the date of the referendum (October 1, 2017) marked a milestone in conflict escalation that might have changed the social relations of Catalans.

In the following sections, we provide a brief historical background on modern Catalan politics and the recent secessionist movement. Next, we set the political conflict into a theoretical context with regard to social misbehaviour. Then, we present the method and evaluate the data. Afterwards, we show and discuss the results, and finally, conclude the paper.

## Political conflict in Catalonia

The Catalan independence movement is an on-going but decade old process between Catalonia and the rest of Spain. The historical ties between these territories were influenced by several independence movements since the 18th century and stark economical differences (Eaude, 2008). During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Catalonia was on the Republican side till the end of the conflict (Beevor, 2006). During Francoist Spain (1939-1975) centralization was one of the main policies resulting in Catalonia losing its autonomous status (as did other regions). Additionally, Catalan as a language was banned from official usage and both language and cultural identity were suppressed (Hermet, 1976).

Figure 1 displays some of the most relevant events in the long-term conflict. After the new democratic Spanish Constitution in 1978, Catalonia regained autonomous status in 1979. The rights of an autonomous community in Spain includes both an autonomous parliament and a high level of competences in

several sectors, such as education and health care (Colomer, 1998). While other parts of Spain (e.g., the Basque Country) also sought secession the strength of those movements has subsided in recent years (De la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2009). In 2006, Catalonia's autonomy statute was given greater competences and financial autonomy.

[Figure 1 near here]

However, the conflict between Catalonia and the rest of Spain grew in severity in 2010. In July, the Constitutional Court decided to limit Catalonia's statute of autonomy (declared in 2006), which increased popular support with regard to the right to decide about secession in a referendum (Rico & Liñeira, 2014). The statutes of autonomy for Catalonia are frequently discussed in the media and are an important part of the political agenda for Catalan politicians (Davis, 2004).

After the governing pact between Convergence and Union and Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) was signed in December 2012, both parties agreed to call a referendum on secession from Spain by 2014. The Spanish's Constitutional Court declared the planned referendum unconstitutional in March 2014. In addition to the Constitutional Court's decision, several disputes between the regional government and the central institutions evolved in the following months. The non-binding referendum was held in November 2014. Around two million out of 5.4 million potential voters participated, and the pro-independence alternative received about 80% of the votes.

After the vote, in January 2015, the President of the Government of Catalo-

nia, Artur Mas, called for early regional elections for September 2015 to gather support for an upcoming declaration of independence. The government declared that the regional elections would represent a plebiscite on secession given that the previous referendum on secession was declared illegal by Spanish Courts. Thus, the secessionist issue superimposed any other policy proposals. Political parties either clearly supported or opposed a secession referendum.

The two major parties that supported the referendum were: Junts pel Sí (Together for Yes), which included a coalition of several major parties - Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia), Demòcrates de Catalunya (Democrats of Catalonia), Moviment d'Esquerres (Left Movement) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia)-, and Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (Popular Unity Candidacy). Other parties stated that the election was not a plebiscite but a normal election. The three major parties who supported this interpretation were: Ciutadans (Citizens), Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (Socialists' Party of Catalonia), and Partit Popular Català (People's Party). The electoral results provided the separatist parties with a majority in the Parliament, and Together for Yes and Popular Unity Candidacy formed the government. The alliance promised an independence referendum, which was finally held on October 1, 2017, also known as 1-O.

The increasing severity of the movement reached a peak in September 2017. Public support in Catalonia and additionally national and international media attention significantly increased (Micó & Carbonell, 2017). Figure 2 shows a



time-line of the most important events in 2017. The referendum was declared illegal by the Spanish Constitutional Court, but the Catalan Parliament approved the secession law on September 6. Supporters of Catalonia’s pro-independence organized themselves into neighborhood groups that prepared for the referendum. In the following days, police forces raided printing shops and offices to confiscate voting papers and ballot boxes. Josep Lluís Trapero, major of the police of Catalonia (Mossos d’Esquadra), i.e., holding the highest position in the Catalan police, ordered the seizing of all electoral material and the closing of all voting centers early in the day of the referendum (1-O).

[Figure 2 near here]

Police forces failed to completely stop the referendum. The National Police Corps beat and mishandled voters in voting centres, which contributed to chaos, led to confrontations in the streets, and hindered numerous people from voting. The Catalan Government (Generalitat de Catalunya) presented the official results as follows: 90.18% voted in favor of independence, 7.83% voted against independence and 1.98% neither favored nor against. The registered voter turnout was 43.03% (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2017a).

The parties supporting secession declared the independence of Catalonia on October 27, 2017. A few hours later, the Council of Ministers of the Spanish government approved, for the first time, the use of Article 155 to dissolve the Catalan Parliament, and called for new elections to be held on December 21, 2017. The results of the October election had far reaching consequences for Catalonia and Spain. Numerous members of the Catalan government, e.g., the

Catalan prime minister Carles Puigdemont, fled Spain as they were charged by the Spanish General Attorney for i.a., rebellion and sedition.

Finally, the regional election in Catalonia in December 2017 lead to a majority in the Parliament of parties supporting secession with 47.5% of the popular vote. The registered voter turnout was 79.09% (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2017b). Figure 3 gives an overview of the election results in December 2017. The black dots show the capitals of the four regions; Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. The map shows that the election results in Catalonia differed significantly between rural and urban areas.

[Figure 3 near here]

The political conflict is yet to be resolved. In general, secessionist parties rely on the use of a common language, i.e., Catalan, and an unfair treatment of the federal government, e.g., fiscal policies, to seek independence. Politicians from parties that opposed the independence stated that it has harmful social consequences. For example, Josep Borrell (the Spanish minister of Foreign Affairs -assumed office June in 2018 for the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) argued that the secessionist movement has put Catalonia on the edge of a non-violent civil confrontation (Europa Press, 2018).

### Social (mis)behaviour

Politicians often refer to terms such as social confrontation or social misbehaviour as the actions that go against the welfare of a given society. However, this term is underexamined in the literature. In the literature on politics and

criminology, anti-social behaviour (ASB) is closely related and attracts the attention of several academic papers. Moreover, political parties show an interest in the causes and the consequences of these actions, i.e., political parties in the UK (Millie, 2008). However, the definition of what is meant by ASB is problematic.

The concept is often used to refer to criminal activities such as terrorist attacks that alter the coexistence. Some of the definitions from the criminologist branch include the harm and offence principle (Feinberg, 1985). However, Burney (2005) explains that anti-social behaviour involves numerous numbers of activities that range from irritations of daily life to other more severe criminal acts. In this line, Millie, Jacobson, Hough, and Paraskevopoulou (2005, p. 9) provide a definition of anti-social behaviour that is close to the meaning that politicians give to the disturbances occurred in Catalonia:

ASB is behaviour that causes harassment, alarm or distress to individuals not of the same household as the perpetrator, such that it requires interventions from the relevant authorities; but criminal prosecution and punishment may be inappropriate because the individual components of the behaviour: 1. are not prohibited by the criminal law or 2. in isolation, constitute relatively minor offences

Millie et al. (2005) complete this definition with 3 different types of anti-social behaviour: 1. interpersonal ASB (generates harassment, alarm or distress in an individual or group), 2. environmental ASB (degrades the local environment), 3. ASB restricting access to public space (obstructive and intimidating

actions that prevent people from using public facilities). Regions and cities that register secessionist movements, such as Catalonia, are likely to report an increase in the three types of anti-social behaviour when the conflict intensifies. However, this argument, which is used by several politicians, is difficult to prove.

Burney (2005) argues that anti-social behaviour is an ambiguous concept that cannot be measured over time. Past memories and comparisons when there was no social confrontation in the street, cannot really answer the question of a change in behaviour. Thus, we cannot compare the number of social incivility such as pushing, shoving, or coarse language (Phillips & Smith, 2003) before and after a political conflict starts. Nonetheless, there is a social activity that can actually be tracked over time in the Catalan context before and after the secession movement: football.

Amateur football data is optimal because we can clearly observe social behavior before, during, and after the referendum in 2017. This is especially interesting as during and after the referendum identity politics might have influenced the behaviour of the inhabitants (Olivieri, 2015). For example, an increase in Catalan national pride might create tensions between supporters or opposers of secession. Additionally, the election outcomes might modify the behavior of supporters and opposers of secession towards each other (Blais, Morin-Chassé, & Singh, 2017). The study of Miguel, Saiegh, and Satyanath (2011) uses survey methodologies and analyzes misconducts in football to examine the behavior of individuals who are exposed to civil war.

Amateur football players compete almost every weekend from September

until June.<sup>2</sup> This means we can track how social behavior evolved over every week. Moreover, the characteristics of the game include penalties for fouls and misconducts that fit the definition of anti-social behaviour proposed by Millie et al. (2005) and the offence principle. The penalties include yellow and red cards, which we use to measure social misbehavior. Penalties, like red or yellow cards, are frequently used as measurements for aggressiveness and conducts that contravene the laws of the game and interfere with normal play (cf., Caruso & Di Domizio, 2013; Jones, Paull, & Erskine, 2002).

We use amateur football as the overwhelming majority of the players live close to their club and in the same community. Moreover, amateur clubs are usually based in towns that are located a few kilometers away from each other, so people often know each other. Professional football does not fulfill this purpose. First, players are not necessarily attached to their club for a long period of time and are highly flexible regarding their workplace. Second, the prizes at stake in professional football are too important, so that it is unlikely that any political conflict could provoke any change in behaviour.

## Data analysis

Amateur football clubs are distributed throughout Catalonia. Clubs operate in rural and urban areas. We use football matches from the seasons 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 for the lowest and second to lowest amateur sports league (tercera and quarta Catalana). Figure 4 maps the number of football clubs that are

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<sup>2</sup>90% of all matches are played on Saturday or Sunday.

included in our study.

[Figure 4 near here]

The share of voters who support parties in favor of seceding is significantly larger in rural than in urban areas. In our analysis, we want to examine if the difference in the share of voters who support parties favoring secession compared to the share of voters who support parties opposing secession has an impact on the social behavior between the groups. We look at ASB before and after the referendum in October 2017.

Two teams play against each other in every football match; a home and an away team. First, we gather the number of yellow and red cards for both home and away team. The International Football Association Board (IFAB) defines a yellow and red card as follows: "A player who commits a cautionable or sending-off offence, either on or off the field of play, against an opponent, a team-mate, a match official or any other person or the Laws of the Game, is disciplined according to the offence. The yellow card communicates a caution and the red card communicates a sending-off." (IFAB, 2018, p. 104). This means that while players who received a yellow card can continue to play this is not the case for players who received a red card. Table 1 shows that on average 4.3 yellow cards are given per match and 0.4 red cards per match.

In the next step, we observe the results from the polling station next to the home team and compare them with the results from the away team. For example, in the community of the amateur football club Arrabal Calaf Gramanet the share of voters who opposed secession was 21.29%. In their league, they

played against Chacarita CF where the share of voters who opposed secession was 84.04%. When those teams play against each other the share difference in favor or against secession is 62.75%. We want to examine if differences in this share have a statistically significant effect on social misbehavior. Table 1 gives an overview about the data we use.<sup>3</sup>

[Table 1 near here]

A straightforward analysis is to analyze the number of red and yellow cards for every game day. Figure 5 (Figure 6) shows the average yellow cards (red cards) for every match day (together with a 95% confidence interval). The vertical line (at point 37) represents the referendum in October 2017. However, this analysis does not control for any other variables. The results in Figure 5 and Figure 6 show that the number of yellow and/or red cards did not significantly change after the referendum.

[Figure 5 near here]

[Figure 6 near here]

We use regression analysis to understand how the different variables influence each other. Regression analysis is frequently mentioned as an appropriate statistical measurement in political science (e.g., Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2014; Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988). Our dependent variables (outcomes) are our measures for ASB: yellow cards and red cards. Yellow cards are the second

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<sup>3</sup>We neglect smaller local parties which cannot be clearly categorized into supporting or opposing secession. Their total magnitude is less than 2%.

highest penalty. Red cards are the highest penalty. Our independent variables (explanatory) are the share differences with respect to their political support for secession for home and away teams and the distance between teams. Moreover, the analysis controls for the period of time before and after the referendum (climax of conflict) to trace any influence on yellows or red cards. In addition, we include the geographical distance between teams as local matches have a tendency to be more violent than other matches (e.g., del Corral, Prieto-Rodriguez, & Simmons, 2010; Reilly & Witt, 2013). Table 2 displays the results.<sup>45</sup>

[Table 2 near here]

The results show that ASB did not increase after the referendum. The post referendum time dummy is not significant. The variable for share difference in favor or against referendum is not statistically significant either. This means that even when teams are located in cities supporting very different political views the social behavior between the teams does not change. As expected, the results show that matches between teams which are located closely to each show more anti social behavior. So that, the greater the distance between teams, the lower the number of cards. However, the result is not significant. The  $R^2$  shows the overall fit of the model.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>We include year and match date fixed effects to control for variation between match dates and year (see e.g., Allison, 2009). Additionally, we cluster the results at the team level as teams might be very different e.g., in terms of strength (Cameron & Miller, 2015).

<sup>5</sup>A quartile regression is also reasonable but does not lead to statistically significantly different results.

<sup>6</sup>As we cannot control for the player skill this might be an explanation for the overall low fit of the model.



## Discussion

The empirical examination shows that ASB between different political groups in Catalonia did not increase. Several interpretations are applicable that might explain why the social behavior between the groups neither increased nor decreased after the referendum.

While the secession movement in Catalonia has gained popular support and widespread media attention (Micó & Carbonell, 2017) it is not a novel discussion for Catalans. Secessionist movements have been on-going in Catalonia for decades. Elections have previously been declared as a polarized decision on secession by some political parties, for example in 2015 (Orriols & Rodon, 2016). Thus, while the independence movement and the regional elections receive nationwide and international media coverage it does not necessarily imply that Catalans are similarly affected. Catalans faced similar elections on secession and they might be hesitant to overestimate the results of one election (whether the results are in favor or against the independence movement). Thus, opposers and supporters of the independence movement live relatively peacefully next to each other as they are used to the on-going debate. Because of data availability issues we were unable to track ASB over a longer period of time. However, an analysis over a long term period could yield interesting insights.

Another possibility is that opposers did not take the referendum in October 2017 seriously. The Spanish government declared the referendum as illegal and thus threatened the credibility of the referendum (Plaza, 2018). Seceding from

Spain, which the referendum supported, was not seen as credible by voters who opposed secession. Accordingly, opposers of secession did not feel threatened by supporters of the movement but rather by the clashes between demonstrators and police forces. Even though numerous voters were hindered by police forces to vote, the voter turnout was comparably small (43.03%).

Several researchers examine how a hypothetical integration of a Catalan state into the European domestic market would work out. Vaubel (2013) argues for a right of secession as the net benefit for all involved parties should increase. Other researchers see the potential economic and political benefits for secessions more critical (e.g., Jones, 2017; Rodríguez-Pose & Stermšek, 2015).

The Catalan voters know about the uncertain economic and political conditions as the president of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani stated before the referendum in October that "If part of the territory of a Member State would cease to be part of that state because it were to become a new independent state, the Treaties would no longer apply to that territory. In other words, a new independent state would, by the fact of its independence, become a third country with respect to the EU and the Treaties would no longer apply on its territory." (Becerra, 2017). This statement reaffirmed the response given by the president of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso in 2013 (European Commission, 2013). People in Catalonia know about this potential uncertainty and do not want to worsen the situation for themselves. To some extent, the decrease in red cards (even marginally small), would support this hypothesis. Thus, violent behavior between groups would only have a negative

effect regardless on the political outcome.

Finally, another explanation is related to the symbolic character of the Catalan process for many citizens. Some analysts argue that for many Catalans the secessionist movement represented a disobedient action against the right-wing politics of the government of Mariano Rajoy. This hypothesis would explain why we see social confrontation in the streets in specific days, e.g., anniversary of referendum day, but why it is not transferred to other daily life activities such as football games. Football players and clubs in this leagues might not even be aware of the opposing club's political ideas. This result goes in favour of the symbolic (less important) character of the social conflict and against the political statements that claim that the secession movement is altering the coexistence of Catalans.

The results from this research provide important insights about the scope of the Catalan movement. This result differs from the findings of Miguel et al. (2011) that confirm that the extent of a player's home country's recent record of civil war conflict is significantly associated with violent actions in football games (yellow and red cards). This is not the case for Catalan amateur football, where the distance between teams (as a proxy for sport rivalry) is more important than political orientation of the opponent's town government (as a proxy for secession movement effect).

Therefore, if the secession movement has not provoked an increase of social (mis)behaviour in a setting like amateur football, where the professional aim of clubs are relatively unimportant, it is unlikely that the conflict affects the

everyday life of Catalans. For example, it is unlikely that autonomous workers such as electricians or plumbers who do not support the secession movement buy their tools in a store that shares their opinion on the Catalan movement, if that goes against their economic interests. Future studies can use different methodologies to examine how important the Catalan secessionist movement is to people with regard to other issues such as personal finances.

As a concluding remark, this paper has investigated the influence that the political conflict in Catalonia has on a popular daily life activity such as amateur football. The violent behaviour in this sport (code violations), which is measured by means of yellows and red cards, is a proxy for anti-social behaviour. This concept is often used in the literature but appropriate empirical methodologies are missing (Burney, 2005). Past memories and comparisons when there was no social confrontation in the streets are impossible to measure, unless access to enquiries in police stations over several years (or similar) is possible and reveals the political identity of individuals. Our main result shows that amateur football teams do not change their behaviour, in terms of violence, towards an opponent due to political preferences on the Catalan process.

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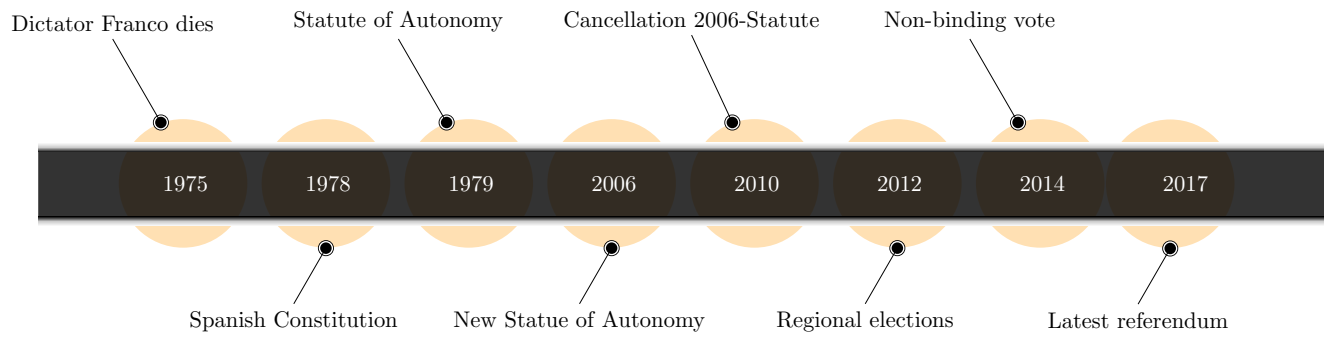
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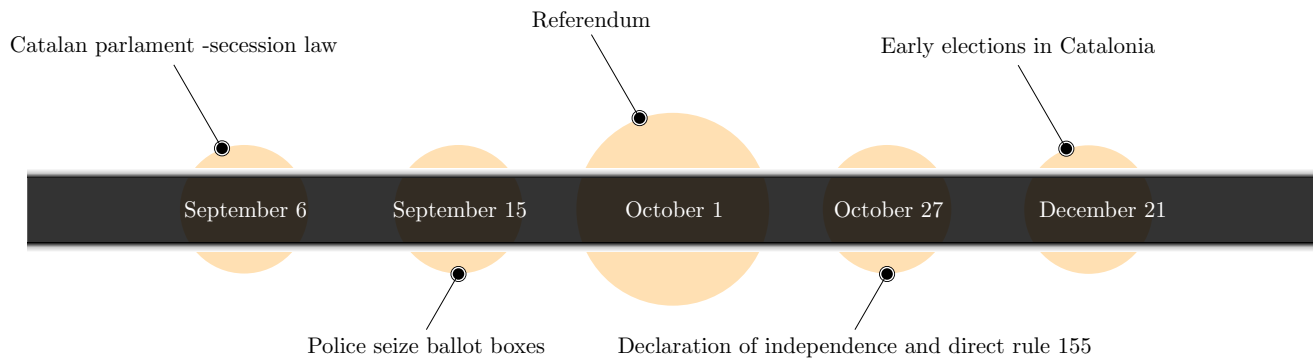
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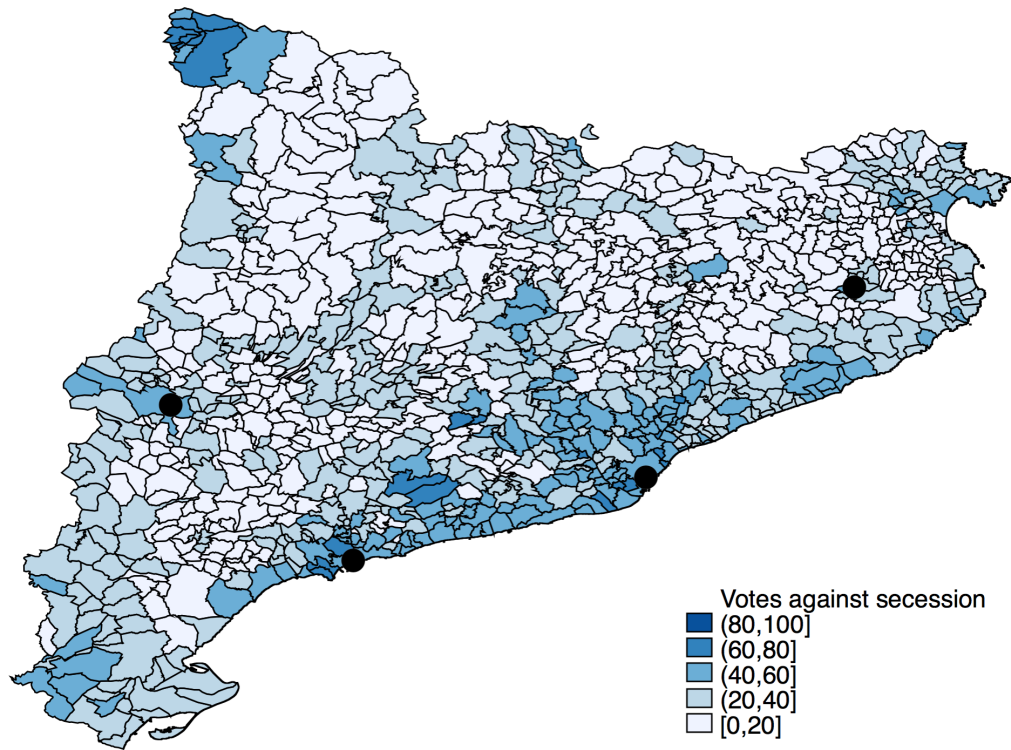




**Figure 1.** Timeline of long-term political conflict in Catalonia (1975-2017)

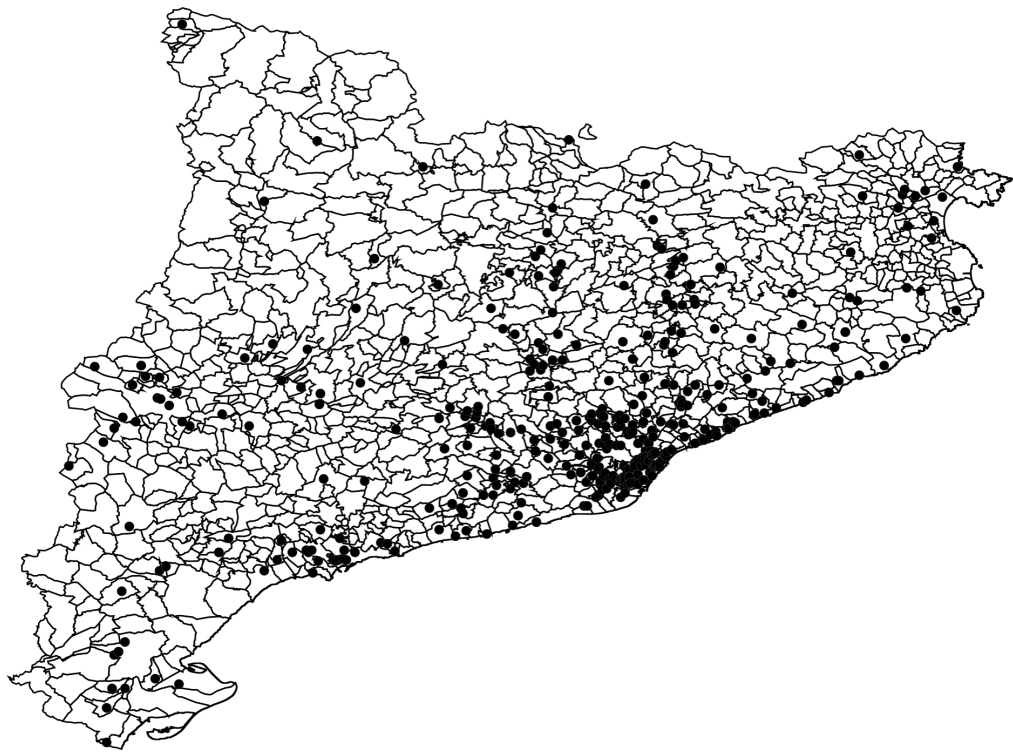


**Figure 2.** Timeline of short-term political conflict in Catalonia (2017)

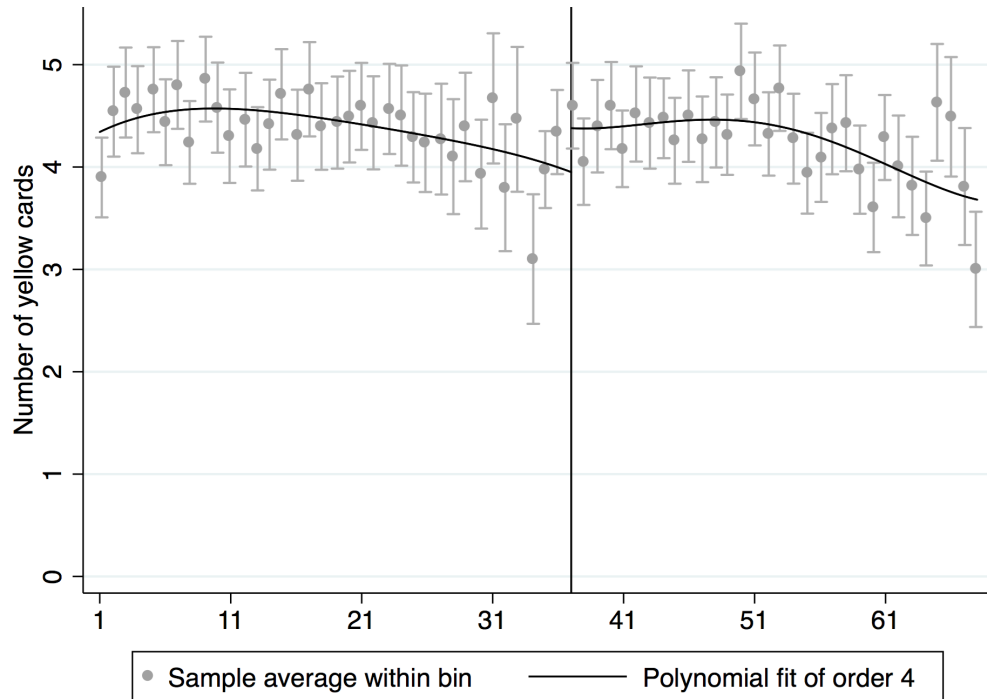


**Figure 3.** Catalonia regional elections 2017.

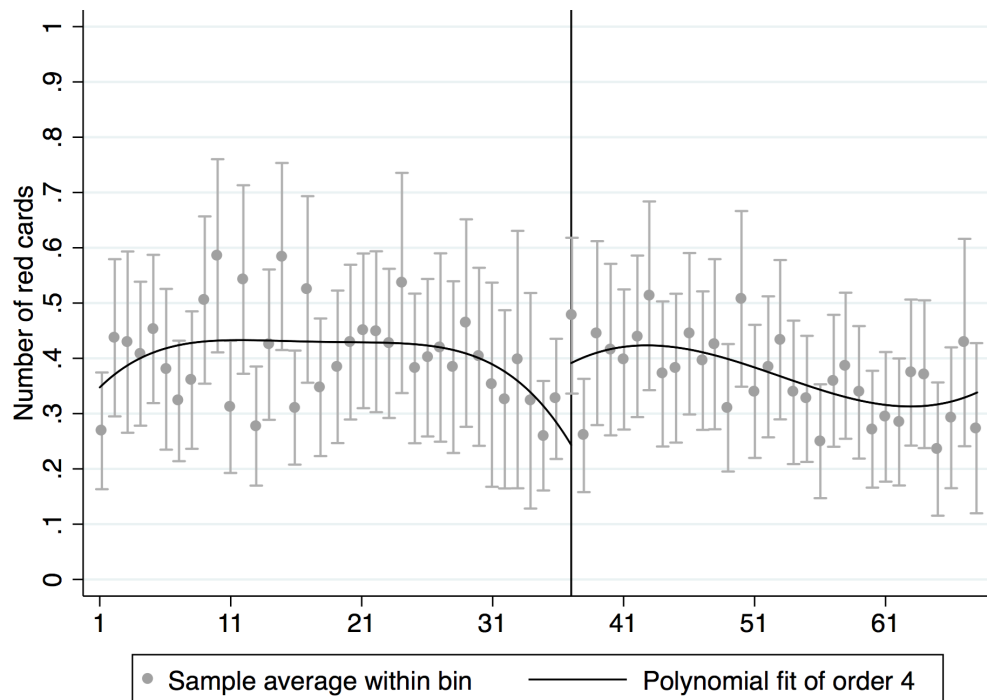
Note: The black dots represent, from left to right, Lleida, Tarragona, Barcelona, and Girona.



**Figure 4.** Amateur football clubs in Catalonia.



**Figure 5.** Average number of yellow cards for every match day from 08.2016-08.2018. The vertical line shows the referendum (1-O) date.



**Figure 6.** Average number of red cards for every match day from 08.2016-08.2018. The vertical line shows the referendum (1-O) date.

**Table 1** Summary statistics.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Obs.
Red cards per match	0.392	0.949	0	9	11,848
Yellow cards per match	4.347	3.049	0	19	11,848
Share difference supporting or against referendum	13.351	12.101	0	60.38	11,848
Distance between teams	14.866	12.53	0	98.44	11,848
Voter share for:					
Catalonia in Common–We Can	6.349	2.964	0	12.15	11,848
Citizens–Party of the Citizenry	23.251	10.08	0	47.51	11,848
People’s Party	3.674	1.646	0	12.14	11,848
Popular Unity Candidacy	4.518	1.953	0	21.65	11,848
Republican Left–Catalonia Yes	22.335	5.669	0	45.00	11,848
Socialists’ Party of Catalonia	12.441	6.083	0	24.92	11,848
Together for Catalonia	25.537	14.344	0	63.38	11,848

**Table 2** Results.

Dependent variable	Yellow Cards	Red Cards
Post referendum time dummy	0.001 (0.107)	-0.041 (0.034)
Share difference supporting or against referendum	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)
Distance between teams	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.001)
Constant	4.083*** (0.158)	0.292*** (0.042)
Observations	11,848	11,848
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.005

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.  
\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05