

Post-Bellicist Secession Theory:
A Historically Grounded Critique of the Contemporary
State System and International Law

Sami Ahonen
Master's Thesis
Political Science
University of Turku
Spring 2025

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Department of Philosophy, Contemporary History and Political Science / Faculty of Social Sciences

AHONEN, SAMI: Post-Bellicist Secession Theory: A Historically Grounded Critique of the Contemporary State System and International Law

Master's Thesis, pp. 158

Political Science

May 2025

This master's thesis provides a historically grounded critique of mainstream international relations theory and international law on statehood by using secession as an analytical lens. It adopts Chowdhury's Post-Bellicist framework, built on Charles Tilly's bellicist state theory, to develop a new explanatory model called Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST). PBST is then applied to five empirical cases of secessionist movements – Catalonia, Iraqi Kurdistan, Scotland, South Sudan, and a control case of Finnish Swedes – to test its plausibility.

Methodologically, the study combines theoretical development with structured comparative analysis. PBST is constructed deductively from Post-Bellicism and augmented with Anderson's concept of imagined communities to capture the nationalist character of secessionist identities. For the empirical evaluation, a structured, focused comparison is used to assess how secessionist aspirations form. Additionally, a Strategic Choice approach, implemented as a cost-benefit analysis, examines how parent states and external actors react to independence attempts.

The findings support the plausibility of PBST. The independence movements in the case studies all arose under conditions of economic disadvantage, that being the net contributor status to the state, and/or political repression. Likewise, parent state and international actor responses to these secession attempts aligned with their material self-interests by generally resisting secession when it threatened their extractive benefits.

Overall, the thesis challenges prevailing international law doctrines and ad hoc conceptions of statehood as starting points for analysing secession. Instead, it advocates for incorporating historically grounded understandings of state formation into both future research on secession and practical legal approaches to self-determination.

Keywords:

Secession, Self-determination, Statehood, State theory, International law, International relations theory, National interest, Cost benefit analysis, Comparative politics

TURUN YLIOPISTO

Filosofian, poliittisen historian ja valtio-opin laitos / Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta

AHONEN, SAMI: Post-Bellicist Secession Theory: A Historically Grounded Critique of the Contemporary State System and International Law

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 158 s.

Valtio-oppi

Toukokuu 2025

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee irtautumispyrkimyksiä (secession) ja valtion luonnetta hyödyntäen historiallisesti ankkuroitua vaihtoehtoista näkökulmaa. Tätä näkökulmaa sovelletaan kansainvälisen oikeuden sekä kansainvälisten suhteiden valtaviiran teorioiden puutteiden kriittiseen arviointiin. Tutkielma kehittää Charles Tillyn bellisistiseen valtioteoriaan pohjautuvaa Arjun Chowdhuryn Post-Bellicism - lähestymistapaa luoden uuden Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) - selitysmallin. Benedict Andersonin “kuviteltujen yhteisöjen” käsite liitetään malliin selittämään itsenäistymispyrkimysten nationalistista luonnetta.

Tutkielma yhdistää teoreettisen mallinnuksen vertailevaan empiiriseen analyysiin. Empiirinen osio toimii PBST-teorian uskottavuuskokeena: selitysmallia sovelletaan viidessä irtautumisesta ja itsenäistymisliikkeitä käsittelevässä tapaustutkimuksessa, jotka koskevat Kataloniaa, Irakin Kurdistania, Skotlantia, Etelä-Sudania sekä vertailutapauksena suomenruotsalaisia. PBST:n ensimmäinen osa, itsenäistymispyrkimysten synty, operationalisoidaan strukturoitua fokuoitua vertailua hyödyntäen. Teorian viimeinen osa, emävaltioiden ja ulkoisten toimijoiden suhtautuminen itsenäistymisyrityksiin, operationalisoidaan strategisen valinnan viitekehityksessä käyttäen kustannus-hyötyanalyysia.

Tutkielman empiiristen kokeiden tulokset tukevat PBST-teorian uskottavuutta. Tutkimusmenetelmä osoittaa, että tapaustutkimusten itsenäistymisliikkeet ovat syntyneet olosuhteissa, joissa liikkeen taustayhteisö on ollut emävaltionsa nettomaksaja ja/tai kohdannut valtiovallan taholta sortoa. Lisäksi emävaltioiden sekä ulkopuolisten toimijoiden suhtautuminen irtautumispyrkimykseen on määräytynyt pääsääntöisesti niiden omista taloudellisista eduista kumpuavien intressien mukaisesti.

Tutkielma kyseenalaistaa kansainvälisen oikeuden sekä valtiota koskevat ad hoc - oletukset tarkastelun lähtökohtina. Tutkimustulokset korostavat, että valtiollisen toiminnan tutkimuksessa, niin akateemisessa yhteydessä kuin oikeudellisessa käytännössä, tulisi ottaa lähtökohdaksi valtioiden historiallisiin mekanismeihin perustuva käsitys.

Asiasanat:

Itsenäistyminen (valtiot), autonomia, kansainvälinen oikeus, kansainväliset suhteet, valtioteoriat, kustannus-hyötyanalyysi, vertaileva tutkimus

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my mom for her unwavering support during the writing of this thesis. Despite likely being sick and tired of hearing about the abstract themes discussed below, she always took the time to listen to me vent and think out loud, encouraging me to keep going.

Secondly, I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Henri Vogt, for his valuable nudges in the right direction throughout the writing process. Although I was initially hesitant to revise sections I considered “good enough,” upon further reflection I always found his comments to be spot on, resulting in a significantly improved thesis.

Thirdly, I would like to thank Associate Professor Michael Hansen. During the previous spring, he tirelessly helped me clarify the kind of thesis I truly wished to pursue, which ultimately led me to abandon my original, ill-fitting plan. As a result, I ended up taking on the subject at hand – the one I had, deep down, wanted to pursue from the very beginning.

I also acknowledge that language checking was supported by Grammarly.

Any potentially controversial claims, interpretations, or normative positions expressed in this thesis are solely my own, or those of the authors cited. They do not necessarily reflect the views of those acknowledged above or the University of Turku. Responsibility for all remaining errors remains solely my own.

Table of Contents

Prologue – Preamble of Spotless Leopards	1
1 Introduction – Secession as a Lens on Statehood and its Moral Contradictions	3
1.1 The Key Concepts	5
1.1.1 State	6
1.1.2 Nation and Nationalism	9
1.1.3 Definition of Secession.....	11
1.1.4 Self-determination of peoples	13
2 Theoretical Foundations – Abandoning International Law and Uncovering Bellicist Insight	16
2.1 International Law, State-Based System, and Secession	16
2.1.1 Creation of States in International Law	18
2.1.2 Secession in International Law	19
2.2 Bellicism: War Made the State and the State Made War	21
2.2.1 Bellicist Paradigm of State Formation.....	21
2.2.2 War-Making and the Entanglement of Society and State	26
2.2.3 Exported but Not Internalised: The European-Style State in Postcolonial Nations.	27
2.3 Post-Bellicism: States, Incapable Yet Central.....	29
2.3.1 The Self-Undermining State	31
2.3.2 The Self-Enforcing Exchange.....	32
2.3.3 The Conditions for Capable States: Costly but Winnable Wars	33
2.3.4 The Changing Parameters of War	35
2.3.5 The Emergence of Alternatives to the State	37
2.3.6 Customary Identities and the Postcolonial Gamble	38
2.3.7 Alternatives to the Postcolonial State and the Hope for Human Rights Delivery	40
2.4 International Law Reprise	43
2.5 Theory Summary.....	46
3 Review of Contemporary State Performance	49
4 Constructing the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory.....	55
4.1 Incorporation of Imagined Communities into Post-Bellicism	56
4.2 Conceptual Tools to Explain Secession	57
4.2.1 Levels of Bargaining	58
4.2.2 Weak and Strong States vs High-Bargaining and Low-Bargaining States	60
4.2.3 Violence Cost Buffer	64
4.2.4 State-Unravelling.....	65
4.2.5 Baseline Resistance to Secession	67

4.3 Post-Bellicist Secession Theory	68
4.3.1 Birth of a Secession	71
4.3.2 Secessionist Attempt and Rationality Check.....	72
4.3.3 Calculating Parent State’s and External Actors’ Reactions	74
4.3.4 The Outcome of the Secession	77
5 Methodology for Plausibility Probing PBST	79
5.1 Operationalisation of the First Research Question – Conditions for the Birth of Secession.....	82
5.2 Operationalisation of the Second Research Question – Reactions to Secession Attempts	85
6 Analysis – Applying Post-Bellicist Secession Theory.....	89
6.1 Analysis for the First Empirical Question.....	89
6.1.1 Catalonia – Background of the Catalan Secessionist Attempt	89
6.1.2 Catalonia – Structured Focused Evaluation	92
6.1.3 Iraqi Kurdistan – Background of the Iraqi Kurdistan Secessionist Attempt	94
6.1.4 Iraqi Kurdistan – Structured Focused Evaluation	98
6.1.5 Scotland – Background of the Scottish Secessionist Non-Attempt	100
6.1.6 Scotland – Structured Focused Evaluation.....	103
6.1.7 South Sudan – Background of the South Sudanese Secessionist Attempt	105
6.1.8 South Sudan – Structured Focused Evaluation.....	110
6.1.9 Finnish Swedes: A Comparison Case – Background of the Finnish Swedes’ Secessionist Non-Aspirations	112
6.1.10 Finnish Swedes: A Comparison Case – Structured Focused Evaluation.....	115
6.1.11 Summary of the Analysis (E1).....	116
6.2 Analysis for the Second Empirical Question.....	117
6.2.1 Catalonia – Cost-Benefit Analysis	118
6.2.2 Scotland – Cost-Benefit Analysis	122
6.2.3 South Sudan – Cost-Benefit Analysis.....	124
6.2.4 Summary of the Analysis (E2).....	128
7 Discussion – On the Explanatory Power of Post-Bellicism: Lessons from Secession.....	131
7.1 On Critiques of Bellicism	132
7.2 Implications for a More Just International Law and State System	133
8 Final Remarks.....	135
Bibliography.....	137

List of Figures

Figure 1. General causal pattern of classic European state-making. Source: Adapted from Tilly (2017a, 135).	25
Figure 2. Civil liberties index, 2023. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2006–2023) processed by Our World in Data. Note: scores range from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating the highest level of civil liberties.	50
Figure 3. Global freedom status, 2025 (data from 2024). Source: Adapted from Freedom House (2025).	50
Figure 4. Foreign aid received, 2023. Source: Our World in Data (n.d.). Note: currency is constant 2022 USD.	52
Figure 5. International Corruption Perceptions Index 2024. Source: Transparency International (2025).....	53
Figure 6. The Bargaining Path: Effects of Bargaining on State Capability and Ruler Freedom. Source: Author’s elaboration.....	62
Figure 7. The Effects of Valuable Natural Resources (VNR) on Initial State Capability and Ruler Freedom. Source: Author’s elaboration.....	63
Figure 8. Flowchart of post-bellicist secession theory (PBST) – conditions for the emergence of secessionist aspirations and the strategic logic of parent state and external actor responses. Source: Author’s elaboration.	70
Figure 9. Phases 1 and 2 of Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST): Trigger Conditions and Parent State Responses to Aspirations. Source: Author’s elaboration.	83
Figure 10. Components of PBST, which will be explored in research question E2. Source: Author’s elaboration.	86
Figure 11. Catalonia (dark green) and Spain (light green). Source: Adapted from Wikimedia Commons (2023).	90
Figure 12. Kurdish-inhabited areas in green based on CIA (1992) data. Source: Adapted from Wikimedia Commons (2023).....	95
Figure 13. Administrative map of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Adapted from: Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (n.d.).	98
Figure 14. Scotland (dark green) and the United Kingdom (light green). Source: Wikimedia Commons (2025).	101
Figure 15. South Sudan (dark green) and Sudan (light green). Source: Adapted from Location South Sudan AU Africa.svg (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.), modified by Author.	106

List of Tables

Table 1. Possible outcomes. Source: Chowdhury (2018, 23).	33
Table 2. War and state-making. Source: Chowdhury (2018, 21).	34
Table 3. War and state-making (as seen in Chowdhury 2018, 77)	36
Table 4. Insurgencies in areas colonised by major European powers, then decolonised, 1800–2000. Source: Lyall and Wilson (2009) as cited in Chowdhury (2018).	40
Table 5. Core Structural Differences Between High-Bargaining and Low-Bargaining States. Source: Author’s elaboration.	59
Table 6. Theoretical Typology of States by Strength and Bargaining Level. Source: Author’s elaboration.	61
Table 7. GDP per capita comparison between Catalonia and Spain, 2010–2017. Source: Countryeconomy (n.d.b) and Countryeconomy (n.d.c). Note: figures are expressed in nominal terms (current prices, not adjusted for inflation).	93
Table 8. The Kurdish population estimate as of 2016. Source: Institut Kurde de Paris (n.d.)... ..	96
Table 9. Kurdistan Region vs Iraq GDP per capita comparison in 2018. Source: Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (2022).	99
Table 10. GDP per capita comparison between Scotland and the United Kingdom, 2010–2014. Source: Scotfact (n.d.). Note: all values in current-year pounds sterling.	105
Table 11. GDP per capita in Sudan and South Sudan, 2008–2011. Source: CountryEconomy (n.d.d) and CountryEconomy (n.d.e).	111
Table 12. Summary of Phase 1 variables in case study cases. Source: Author’s compilation.	116
Table 13. Cost-benefit analysis for parent state and external actors in Catalanian case. Source: Author’s compilation.	119
Table 14. Cost-benefit analysis for the parent state and external actors in the Scottish case. Source: Author’s compilation.	122
Table 15. Cost-benefit analysis for parent state and external actors in the South Sudanese case. Source: Author’s compilation.	125
Table 16. Summary of E2 Actor Reactions and PBST Consistency.	129

Glossary

Baseline resistance

The instinctive opposition of states to secessions and other changes to the state system, driven by the perceived stability and vested interests in it.

Bargaining

A concept central to both Tilly's Bellicist framework and Chowdhury's Post-Bellicism, referring to the historical exchange between rulers and ruled, wherein the population provided resources (e.g. taxes, soldiers) in return for concessions such as rights, representation, or protection. This reciprocal relationship was forged under the pressures of costly but winnable war in Europe, but has often been absent in postcolonial states, where external support or rents substitute for domestic consent.

Cost of state-making required

The additional cost a parent state would need to bear to continue governing and integrating a contested region.

Costly yet winnable wars

Wars that are destructive enough to require broad societal mobilisation, but still offer a realistic chance of victory. Their historical presence drove rulers to bargain with populations, strengthening states. In Post-Bellicist theory, their absence in contemporary times explains the persistence of weak states.

Distinct identity formation

The development of a socially constructed sense of collective cultural or political uniqueness capable of mobilisation: a people.

Extraction gain of secessionist area

The value a parent state extracts from a contested region, used to calculate the cost-benefit of retaining it.

External actor's extraction impact

The effect secession has on an external actor's ability to maintain or improve their own economic extraction activities.

External actor's hostile war-making reduction

The weakening of an external actor's enemy states' military capacity through the secession of a region.

High-bargaining states

States where rulers have been forced to negotiate with the population and provide substantial returns in exchange for political support, making them constrained by deep institutional structures.

Low-bargaining states

States that maintain authority primarily through coercion rather than bargaining, often relying on loyalty networks and personalistic rule.

Material benefit

The net extraction value a parent state derives from a region, considering resources and taxes, minus control costs.

Material non-benefit

A condition in which a population would be materially better off under its own governance, typically because it contributes more to the existing state than it receives in return.

Repression

The use of coercive force, including violent or legal and illegal political measures, to limit or eliminate separatist or dissenting activities.

Self-enforcing exchange

A mutual survival logic where populations willingly supply the state with support (e.g., taxes, manpower) in return for protection, present only under the threat of a costly but winnable war.

Spillover risk

The potential for successful or attempted secession in one region to inspire, legitimise, or catalyse secessionist movements elsewhere within the parent state or external actor.

State-making failure

The inability of a state to integrate distinct populations, leading to internal contestation and undermined legitimacy.

State-unravelling

The process where the state is forced to withdraw from domains of life (social, economic, territorial), losing control to alternative loci of power without successful reassertion. Three forms of state-unravelling are identified: insurrectionary unravelling, strategic unravelling, and institutional unravelling.

Violence cost buffer

A pre-existing coercive capacity (army, police) that enables a state to repress or wage limited wars without incurring immediate new costs.

List of Abbreviations

AU – African Union

CBA – Cost-Benefit Analysis

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone

EU – European Union

IL – International Law

PBST – Post-Bellicist Secession Theory

R2P – Responsibility to Protect

SCA – Strategic Choice Approach

SFC – Structured Focused Comparison

TWAIL – Third World Approaches to International Law

UN – United Nations

VNR – Valuable Natural Resource

Prologue – Preamble of Spotless Leopards

Surely, with their combined efforts, the determined peoples of the United Nations have succeeded in achieving their ends, and the future generations have been saved from the scourge of war? Has faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women, and in nations large and small been reaffirmed? Have the conditions for justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law been firmly established?

Surely, the United Nations achieves its purpose of maintaining international peace and security, and a permanent member of the Security Council is not engaged in a war of aggression against another sovereign nation?¹ If that were the case, surely all other nations would condemn the invasion instead of supporting it or remaining neutral?² If such a thing occurred, the Security Council member wouldn't go virtually unpunished, with money still flowing into its coffers?³

Should friendly relations among nations based on the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples have been achieved, then surely, a UN member state has not been accused of genocide?⁴ Furthermore, if that were the case, surely other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace would be taken, and surely no permanent member of the Security Council would support this accused genocidal nation with twelve and a half billion dollars in direct military aid during its campaign?⁵

Surely, the self-determination of peoples would at least otherwise be achieved, and there wouldn't be as many as 55 active secessionist movements worldwide?⁶ Wouldn't it be so that when the righteous nations get together in international cooperation solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, they are successful in

¹ See, for example, Council of the European Union (2024).

² See, for example, Statista (2022).

³ See, for example, The New York Times (2024a).

⁴ See, for example, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2024).

⁵ See, for example, Council on Foreign Relations (2024).

⁶ As of 2011. Griffiths (2016).

their attempt, and halfway through the program, only 15% of the goals are on track, with as many as 37% regressing or severely off the course?⁷

Could it be, instead, that such a gathering of states to achieve these noble goals is like a leap of leopards coming together and promising to change their spots? Could it be that the system merely legitimises states, hiding away their fundamental purpose of extraction and warring, as well as their hierarchical nature as tools for elites to rule? Could these elites' interests be the ultimate reason for the sustained failure to act against climate change? Could it be that these fundamental purposes and nature undermine the sincere attempts of international organs to provide human rights to all, along with eradicating poverty and providing a genuine possibility of self-determination?

Could the granted self-determination of peoples during decolonisation be more appropriately described as the self-determination of colonial states instead of the peoples within their borders? Could this be a reason for several civil wars and insurgencies? Could it be that international law doesn't provide governance where it matters most for the current international system at all? Could the international order be, in fact, only a myth? It indeed might.

These questions underline the paradoxes that this thesis will address: in a world of sovereign states, the ideals of peace, human rights, and self-determination are not enforced by law, but negotiated through power – and often denied altogether.

⁷ United Nations (2023).

1 Introduction – Secession as a Lens on Statehood and its Moral Contradictions

The underlying purpose of this thesis is to dismantle the normatively inconsistent foundations of the international state system and to demonstrate the utility of replacing them with a historically grounded, materially honest understanding of statehood as a basis for scientific inquiry.

This is pursued by examining the ways in which international law has been used to construct an illusion of legitimacy around existing states – an illusion rooted not in justice or consent, but in the deliberate erasure of their violent and extractive origins. Because such dynamics are most visibly exposed when states are confronted with internal contestation, the phenomenon of secession is adopted as the central object of inquiry.

Initial efforts to interpret secession through the lens of international law were shown to produce confusion rather than clarity. This failure motivated the development of a more grounded theoretical alternative: Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST). PBST is derived from Arjun Chowdhury's (2018) *Post-Bellicism*, which itself draws on Charles Tilly's bellicist account of state formation. Through this lineage, secession is reframed not as a legal anomaly, but as a continuation of the material power struggles through which states have historically been forged and maintained.

Within this framework, the conditions under which independence claims are denied or dismissed are interrogated, and it is demonstrated that material interests – rather than legal norms – determine whether secessionist movements are resisted or accommodated. The theory is applied to explain how secessionist aspirations are formed, how they develop into political movements, and how the responses of parent states and external actors are shaped. Whereas Chowdhury's original critique focused on the failure of weak states to provide human rights, PBST extends that critique into the domain of self-determination, exposing the structural inadequacy of states in fulfilling this core principle.

To guide the investigation, the following research questions are addressed:

Theoretical question (T): How can Post-Bellicism explain secession?

Empirical question 1 (E1): Can material non-benefit and repression, as theorised in PBST, account for the emergence of secessionist movements?

Empirical question 2 (E2): Can extraction⁸ interests plausibly account for the stance parent states and external actors take toward independence attempts?

By addressing these questions, a Post-Bellicist critique is constructed against dominant paradigms within international law and international relations. While conventional theories in international relations, economics, and legal scholarship tend to presume the legitimacy and effectiveness of states – thus neglecting their weaknesses – this thesis is situated within a materially grounded perspective. Through this lens, the paradoxes and contradictions embedded within the legal and diplomatic norms of sovereignty are critically examined and their normative pretensions are challenged.

The theoretical scope of the thesis includes an exposition of Tilly’s original bellicist model, a critical engagement with Chowdhury’s Post-Bellicism, and the adaptation of these insights into PBST. Empirically, structured comparisons of contemporary secessionist movements are employed, not to provide an exhaustive legal or historical account, but to expose the theoretical assumptions that continue to shape state behaviour.

A dual methodological strategy is employed. For the theoretical question (T), a deductive theory-construction method is followed, drawing on the structured approach developed by Shoemaker, Tankard, and Lasorsa (2004), and integrating conceptual insights from Bellicism, Post-Bellicism, and Anderson’s (2006) notion of imagined communities. For the empirical questions (E1 and E2), a two-part empirical strategy is adopted: E1 is approached through Structured Focused Comparison (SFC), in which PBST-derived variables are tested across selected case studies to ensure internal consistency and contextual relevance; E2 is examined through a Strategic Choice Approach (SCA), supplemented by Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA), embedding Post-Bellicist logics within rational-choice modelling frameworks.

⁸ The term “extraction” is derived from Post-Bellicist theory and explained in the second chapter.

Secessionist attempts pursued through referendums are selected as the empirical focus. These efforts are understood to reflect the normative ideals of democratic self-determination as articulated in international law, while simultaneously exposing the contradictions of a state system that tends to prioritise constitutional integrity over democratic will. In cases where legal pathways are denied, the escalation of political aspirations into violence is often facilitated. Since secession remains one of the few viable routes to state creation in the contemporary world, its study is essential for understanding the rigidity of the international system and the risks it produces.

Through this approach, critical insights are offered into the material foundations of statehood, the contested meaning of self-determination, and the normative shortcomings of the international legal order. By combining theoretical development with empirical analysis, the groundwork is laid for a more historically and materially informed critique of state legitimacy.

This thesis proceeds as follows. The remainder of Chapter 1 defines the core concepts of state, nation, secession, and self-determination. Chapter 2 outlines the contradictions inherent in international law, presents Tilly's bellicist theory and Chowdhury's Post-Bellicism. Chapter 3 offers a Post-Bellicist evaluation of the contemporary state system. Chapter 4 constructs PBST through theoretical adaptation. Chapter 5 operationalises the theory into a research design, detailing the SFC and SCA+CBA methods. Chapter 6 applies these tools to a structured comparison of contemporary secessionist cases. Chapter 7 synthesises the empirical findings, reflects on their theoretical implications, evaluates the contributions and limitations of the study, and identifies future avenues for research. Chapter 8 offers final remarks.

1.1 The Key Concepts

This chapter offers a concise examination of the key concepts relevant to this thesis. Through this conceptual groundwork, the thesis is situated within the broader academic discussion surrounding statehood, nationhood, and secession. The following theory chapter then builds on this foundation by first engaging with international law's treatment of secession, before moving on to the frameworks of Bellicism and Post-Bellicism.

1.1.1 State

The concept of the state is foundational to this thesis. The main theoretical framework of Post-Bellicism utilised in this study is fundamentally a theory about the nature, origins, and function of the state. Before this framework can be meaningfully applied to secession, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "state" and how various academic traditions have attempted to define it.

In the general understanding, the very concept of state is an elusive one. An average person likely describes the state as an area with laws and borders, a government, or as a nation with its population of a specific culture(s).

The existing models and conceptualisations vary greatly in their content and emphasis between fields. In political science, the formulations of the state typically draw from social philosophy, with influential conceptual foundations laid by classical theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Earliest of them all, Hobbes ([1651] 1996), having lived in a time of severe societal turmoil, emphasised the role of the sovereign in upholding order to avoid a "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" life for people. Not much after him, Locke ([1689] 1988) formulated his more limited-government approach based on the concept of natural rights. Lastly, Rousseau ([1762] 1997) introduced the concept of general will, which emphasised giving the people of a state a larger say in how the state was run in an ideal situation.

All these classical formulations are a combination of political ideology and philosophy, with heavy moral "oughts" attached to the concept of the state. There was a shift towards more accurate descriptions of states in more contemporary conceptions.

The regime of international law gave its two cents to the attempt to establish a formal definition of statehood with the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933). The international treaty outlined four essential criteria: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states (*ibid.*, Art. 1).

However, while the criteria would have been a great starting point for a common definition, the period during which it was applied was short with the introduction of the United Nations

and its recognition-based approach to independence.⁹ This is an unfortunate fact that wastes the highly promising potential that international law has in the discussion of statehood.

Instead, within the fields of social sciences, the state theory had shifted from normative conceptualisations to empirical sociological analysis. Max Weber (2009 [1919], 78) introduced what remains the most widely accepted definition of the state: "a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory".

This Weberian conception moves beyond formal criteria to emphasise effective control and legitimacy. While 'effective control' is rather easy to recognise, his definition brings forward inquiries on what counts as 'legitimate'. Nonetheless, Weber's definition is useful in categorising an entity as a state or not; it still offers limited explanations of how states came to be, or what for it seeks to monopolise violence. Thus, while the Weberian insight is an excellent description, it is still very superficial when it comes to explaining the phenomenon. Perhaps a more historical analysis could more adequately lay out more comprehensive theories of the state?

Historical sociology, also known as the Bellicist theory of state birth,¹⁰ does just this. Renowned sociologist Charles Tilly (1929–2008) offers a historical-empirical insight into how states were formed, under what conditions and with what mechanisms they managed to prosper, and under which conditions they would cease to be. Bellicism reveals the central role of wars in the formation of European-style centralised states, with states ultimately being a major unintended consequence of racketeering warlords' attempts to increase the spans of their extraction territories.

Tilly's Bellicism was later complemented, as mentioned, by Chowdhury in his work *The Myth of International Order* (2018), where he refined Tilly's Bellicism into an even more elaborate theory of state birth and function, which is coined here as Post-Bellicism. Central amendments of Post-Bellicism include advanced insights into the nature of wars required for

⁹ Since its establishment, the United Nations (UN) Charter has become one of the defining sources of international law, with admission to the UN serving as the key factor in becoming a de jure state – what was once a legal question has now shifted to the political realm.

For more on the significance of the UN membership in being a recognised state, see Griffiths (2021).

¹⁰ Referred to simply as Bellicism from this point on.

the birth of “strong”, centralised states, as well as how the importation of European-style states during and after postcolonialism has been a gamble from the beginning.

Post-Bellicism offers a framework for critically examining states, as well as assessing the feasibility of state-centric plans addressing contemporary issues such as global warming, poverty, and conflict. Most importantly, with the ability to recognise states for what they are and what they are not, it becomes possible to evaluate whether states are that valuable as units of the international order to begin with.

Post-Bellicism has different fundamental conceptions of statehood than mainstream international relations theories have, and a brief comparison between them is in order.¹¹

Unlike mainstream paradigms in International Relations, Post-Bellicism does not assume the state as a static or given unit but instead views it as a contingent product of historical and material conditions.

Realism, for instance, takes the state as the rational primary actor in an anarchic international system, prioritising survival and power accumulation (see, for example, Waltz 1979). However, it fails to address, for example, why states emerged in the first place, or why their forms and functions vary significantly across time and regions. Liberalism, on the other hand, focuses on the role of institutions, cooperation, and economic interdependence in shaping state behaviour (see, for example, Keohane 1984), yet it treats states as rational utility-maximisers without accounting for the historically contingent processes that determine which “rational” interests dominate within a given state. Constructivism (Wendt 1999), in turn, provides a more flexible approach, emphasising the social construction of state identities and interests, yet it offers little explanatory power regarding why states behave in materially driven patterns or why some states fail to develop robust institutions altogether.

Post-Bellicism challenges these assumptions by placing extraction – not security, cooperation, or identity – at the core of state formation and function. It argues that states are not inherently rational, cooperative, or socially constructed entities but rather the most efficient war-making institutions seeking to provide the level of extraction its owner wishes to – which used to typically be the maximum level. By grounding its analysis in historical

¹¹ The fundamental conceptions are different, as Post-Bellicism has proper fundamental conceptions to begin with, unlike the rest, which mainly operate on assumptions.

sociology rather than abstract assumptions of anarchy, rationality, or social norms, Post-Bellicism offers a framework that is both empirically grounded and materially explanatory.

The next section explores another concept that gets easily mixed with the concept of a state, especially for people coming from what one could call nation-states.

1.1.2 Nation and Nationalism

While the focus of this thesis is on the state, the concept of the nation – and the discourse of nationalism – remains deeply relevant. Secessionist claims are often framed through national identity, and any serious analysis of self-determination must account for how nations are imagined, constructed, and mobilised. This subchapter explores how nationalism has been theorised and why it continues to shape political struggles around sovereignty and statehood.

Given the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the substance of nationalism, this thesis follows the footsteps of Umut Özkirimli (2017), who “deliberately refrain[s] from offering a more precise definition of the ‘nation’ in order not to fall into the trap of ‘reification,’”¹² and treats “nationalism as a discourse, a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us” (Özkirimli 2017, 218). Consequently, the specific contents of different nationalisms are treated as secondary to the mere existence of nationalist movements.

The concept of the “nation” is often entangled with related ideas such as state, culture, and ethnicity. As a result, the study of nationalism frequently begins by distinguishing between these overlapping terms. Özkirimli (2017) provides an excellent and comprehensive overview of the major schools within nationalism studies. According to his classification, influential approaches include: primordialism and perennialism; modernism – further divided into strands emphasising a) economic transformations, b) political power struggles and elite competition, and c) social and cultural factors; ethnosymbolism; and contemporary approaches (ibid., 9).

Out of the various theoretical approaches, this thesis adopts Benedict Anderson’s (2006) conceptualisation of nations as “imagined communities,” which falls under the second type

¹² Özkirimli’s quotation continues by cautioning against treating “categories of practice” as “categories of analysis” (2017, 218).

of modernism.¹³ Like Bellicism and Post-Bellicism, Anderson's framework seeks to uncover the historical and material conditions that contributed to the emergence of nationalism. He places print capitalism's need for expanded markets – and the role of vernacular languages in enabling that expansion – at the centre of nationalism's rise (see *ibid.*, 36–37). Anderson argues that the idea of the nation provides individuals with a sense of belonging and shared identity, even though members of the same nation will never meet most of their fellow citizens (*ibid.*, 6).

Unlike many common conceptions of nationality, Anderson's (2006) account does not position language as the primary dividing factor between nations. This is evident in his argument that nationalism first emerged in the Americas, developed by Creoles who spoke the same language as their colonial rulers – a fact that did not prevent nationalist aspirations from forming. Instead, nationalism was driven by a sense of “otherness,” shaped by shared experiences such as pilgrimage to the imperial capital and exclusion from the core's governing institutions. These invisible boundaries – separating colonial-born citizens from those born in the metropolis – combined with economic policies unfavourable to colonial interests, fuelled the Creoles' discontent (*ibid.*, 47–65).

As an ideology, Anderson (2006) argues, nationalism proved extraordinarily powerful, serving – among other functions – a quasi-religious role by linking individual fate to the destiny of the nation. This infused acts of self-sacrifice with deeper meaning, as individuals came to perceive themselves as “living on” through the survival of the national community (see *ibid.*, 9–12). Anderson's concept of imagined communities plays an important role in the development of PBST later in Chapter 4 and will be revisited accordingly.

The distinction between nation and state can be aptly illustrated through Philip K. Dick's (1978) insight that “reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.” In this sense, the nation is a construct sustained by collective belief, shaped by shared narratives and identities. The state, by contrast, is a material and institutional structure that persists regardless of belief, grounded in laws, bureaucracy, and coercive mechanisms. Even in so-

¹³ This approach aligns with Özkirimli's perspective, as the actual contents of nation and nationalism remain to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

called “nation-states,” the state would endure if citizens ceased to identify themselves as a single nation, despite sharing language, heritage, and history.¹⁴

This thesis focuses on the concept of the state rather than that of the nation or nationalism. While nationalism and statehood are closely linked, distinguishing between them allows for an analysis of the material conditions that shaped states before the rise of nationalism – and that continued to underpin them after. Nonetheless, nation and nationalism remain highly relevant to understanding secession and the self-determination of peoples.

1.1.3 Definition of Secession

Secession is the central phenomenon examined in this thesis, yet its definition is more contested than it might first appear. How secession is understood – legally, politically, and conceptually – shapes which cases are included in the analysis and how their significance is interpreted. This sub-section outlines common approaches to defining secession and clarifies the definition adopted in this study.

Compared to the concept of “nation,” scholars exhibit a significantly higher degree of agreement regarding the meaning of “secession.” In *Secession: A Much Contested Concept*, Aleksandar Pavković (2015) critically examines this debate and categorises scholarly definitions into two broad types: *restrictive* and *permissive*.¹⁵

Pavković summarises that virtually all definitions agree that secession involves the creation of a new state through the withdrawal of a territory and its population from an existing one (ibid., 1). He also notes that it generally entails the original state losing its “sovereignty or the capacity to exercise its sovereignty over the detached territory” (ibid., 3).

The key distinction between restrictive and permissive definitions lies in scope. Restrictive definitions limit secession to cases involving the use or threat of force. Permissive definitions, by contrast, include nearly all instances of territorial withdrawal, including decolonisation (ibid., 1).

¹⁴ The degree to which institutions are “real” is, of course, debatable; the key point here is the fundamentally “directionless” nature of nationalism, which must be politically articulated to become a tangible force.

¹⁵ Notably, he begins his text with the following thought: “When reading some scholarly works on secession, one may wonder whether the study of secession is a worthwhile scholarly activity at all” (Pavković 2015, 2). Fortunately, he doesn’t aim to dismiss the topic but instead uses this as a rhetorical setup to argue for the permissive approach – and with it, the increasing relevance of secession as a phenomenon.

Crawford's (2006) restrictive definition – offered by one of the most authoritative figures in international law – is so narrow that only one post-1945 case qualifies as secession: Bangladesh (Pavković 2015, 6, 17). Adopting such a definition would exclude all relevant cases in this thesis and offer limited analytical utility. Permissive definitions, on the other hand, allow for a broader and more meaningful understanding of territorial withdrawals across varied historical and political contexts.

This thesis, therefore, adopts the permissive definition. This perspective aligns with the broader critical stance on international law taken in the thesis, echoing Pavković's observation that "many legal scholars and a few political scientists advocate restrictive definitions, but there are also scholars from both disciplines who support permissive definitions with a similar or identical scope".¹⁶

Two related concepts that require distinction from secession are *irredenta* and *unification*. *Irredenta* refers to a region breaking away from one state with the intention of joining another, thereby introducing a third actor – the receiving state. *Unification*, by contrast, occurs when two states merge, either through absorption (as in German reunification in 1990) or the formation of a new polity (such as the Kingdom of Italy in 1861). (Pavković 2015, 9, 11.)

A further related concept is *dissolution*, where a state disintegrates into multiple new entities, resulting in the disappearance of the original state. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 is a prominent example.

Pavković (2015) also discusses *decolonisation*, which – though not a primary focus of this thesis – remains relevant. While linked to the principle of self-determination, decolonisation is not classified as secession under the UN's legal framework. According to General Assembly Resolutions 1514 and 1515, decolonisation applies only to territories geographically

¹⁶ Pavković (2015) also notes that normative theorists of secession typically adopt permissive definitions, further reinforcing this thesis's alignment with the permissive approach:

"Permissive definitions seem to suggest that it is not secessions that should be morally assessed but the ways in which they are carried out or the means used to do so; in contrast, restrictive definitions suggest that there are too few secessions to worry about moral assessments. Normative theorists of secession, who aim at a moral assessment of secessions from a philosophical perspective, pay no attention to these suggestions; they usually adopt permissive definitions which would allow them to apply universal moral norms to a variety of secessions. The common ground between the definitions of secession found in legal scholarship, political science and normative theory, it is argued here, may be thus found in permissive approaches to the definition of secession". (Ibid., 1–2.)

separated from the host state by an ocean or sea. The UN Charter otherwise prohibits territorial withdrawal. (Ibid., 5, 12.)

The next chapter will examine the principle of self-determination, originally intended to be realised for colonised peoples through the process of decolonisation.¹⁷

1.1.4 Self-determination of peoples

The self-determination of peoples is central to the study of secession, as it distinguishes rule by external imposition from rule based on negotiated consent. Since the transition from subjects to citizens, epitomised by the French Revolution, political authority has – at least formally – rested on the consent of the governed. A state may claim to embody self-determination if its rulers assert that they represent “the people.” Yet this claim is merely perfunctory when, within its borders, groups consider themselves to constitute distinct peoples.

Although self-determination is a foundational value in the international system, its definition remains deeply contested. In her review of *The Theory of Self-Determination*, Anna Stilz¹⁸ raises a number of essential questions: “How do we define the ‘self’?”, “What groups count as ‘peoples’ with a right to self-determination?”, “What does the right allow those groups to do, precisely?”, and perhaps most importantly, “Does it allow unilateral secession?” The volume brings together philosophers and international lawyers to explore these issues in depth. This section draws from the key insights of Stilz’s summary.

The principle of self-determination is well established in international law. It appears in Article 1 of the UN Charter and is reinforced by subsequent human rights covenants. As Stilz (2017) notes, this period of decolonisation marked a shift in the principle’s status – from abstract ideal to recognised right. However, its clarity diminished when the International Court of Justice avoided ruling directly on self-determination in its 2010 advisory opinion on Kosovo, focusing instead on the legality of the declaration of independence. The Court declined to confirm whether Kosovo had a legal right to secession, leaving the matter to political

¹⁷ For a more detailed comparison of approaches to secession across legal, political, and normative theory, see Pavković (2015).

¹⁸ At the time of publication, Stilz held the position of Laurence S. Rockefeller Professor of Politics and Human Values at Princeton University.

discretion and force. Many contributors in the volume expressed concern that this left the question of secession to the realm of politics and force.¹⁹ (Ibid., 522).

The book offers a number of competing views on secession. Sceptical views, particularly those of John Morss, argue that self-determination has outlived its usefulness in international law – not necessarily because the principle is morally flawed, but rather due to its redundant utility in current practice. Matthew Lister brings up the potential problem of population transfers that might “be incentivised” by self-determination, as there are no mechanisms to handle them.²⁰ (Ibid., 521.) Lastly, Frédéric Mégret presents a view that, in my assessment, borders on the absurd: the conditions for earning self-determination include good governance, respect for minorities, and efforts to work within existing political institutions before external independence can be justified. In my view, this position is deeply flawed, as many existing states – including so-called nation-states – blatantly disregard these norms, yet their sovereignty remains legally protected.²¹ (Ibid., 521.)

In contrast to the more sceptical perspectives, several contributors offer normative arguments in favour of self-determination. Some rely on nationalist justifications, grounding the principle in the material interests of peoples in securing national autonomy. Of other views, Alan Patten argues that self-determination should not be limited to democratic participation within the state but also entails what he calls a “boundary condition” – that political boundaries ought to be drawn in ways that allow minorities meaningful control over their internal affairs. However, he limits this right to internal autonomy rather than full independence.

A different philosophical argument, offered by van der Vossen, holds that groups can develop “emergent norms” that are not reducible to individual beliefs or cultural traits, and that these norms can serve as a basis for political cooperation. He also contends that self-

¹⁹ Their concerns appear well-founded, as this reflects the prevailing contemporary view of international law and secession.

²⁰ As a critique of this view, it is worth noting that the right to self-determination of peoples does not exclude minority rights. Crucially, it is not equivalent to a right to population transfers.

²¹ One might object that international law already provides a framework for overriding state sovereignty – namely, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). However, R2P has had an extremely limited impact in practice, and humanitarian interventions have occurred only very selectively.

determination applies beyond the context of state formation, where it is most commonly invoked. (Ibid., 522.)

Stilz (2017) commends the volume for advancing conceptions of self-determination that move beyond cultural or ethnic essentialism. On this view, “peoples” are defined not by shared traits but by their willingness to engage in political cooperation. As examples, she cites multinational states such as Canada, Belgium, and India – whose populations may qualify as “peoples” despite lacking unified cultural identities.²² She further notes that internal minorities with shared political aims or ideological commitments may also meet this threshold. On this basis, Stilz supports theorising self-determination as a political, not cultural, claim – and calls for further development of this approach (ibid., 522–523).

The Post-Bellicist perspective developed in this thesis intuitively aligns with Stilz’s position. States – ultimately tools of extraction – often shape themselves, though not always, along linguistic or cultural lines, and attempt to construct “peoples” out of their citizens. When this fails, groups who see themselves as distinct arguably retain the right to full political self-determination, especially given that state borders are not intrinsically sacrosanct. While cultural and linguistic lines do matter, “peoples” are more often constituted through patterns of inclusion and exclusion – access to economic resources, institutions, and political power. Shared cultural traits do not confer legitimacy; rather, they help individuals recognise shared conditions and organise around them.

With the key concepts now in place, the next chapter provides the theoretical foundation for this thesis. It begins with an overview of the international legal framework, then turns to historical and materialist theories of the state, ultimately developing the Post-Bellicist lens through which secession will be analysed.

²² A knowledgeable reader may note that all of these states have, or have had, active secessionist movements – an indication of the underlying tensions that often accompany multinational political arrangements.

2 Theoretical Foundations – Abandoning International Law and Uncovering Bellicist Insight

This chapter establishes the relevance of Bellicism and Post-Bellicism for understanding key phenomena in international relations and political science. It outlines these frameworks and demonstrates their analytical utility by critically examining the dominant authority in global affairs: international law. Special attention is given to the foundational inconsistencies within this legal regime, which undermine its moral authority – particularly in regulating secession. The overarching aim is to provide the historical and theoretical foundation for this thesis's central claim: that the state system is not, and never has been, morally superior.

The chapter proceeds as follows: Section 2.1 outlines the core principles of international law and highlights internal contradictions relevant to secessionist claims. Section 2.2 introduces Tilly's Bellicist framework, a historically grounded alternative to normative conceptions of statehood. Section 2.3 presents Chowdhury's Post-Bellicism, which explains contemporary state weakness as a product of the collapse of historical mechanisms that once sustained state legitimacy. Section 2.4 revisits international law through the lens of Post-Bellicism, exposing its ontological fragility and practical irrelevance. Finally Section 2.5 summarises the theoretical insights.

2.1 International Law, State-Based System, and Secession

This section examines the historical development of international law (IL), focusing on its central dogmas: sovereignty and the self-determination of peoples. Understanding how these ideas evolved – and to what ends – is essential for assessing the legal regime's adequacy in addressing secession. After introducing the frameworks of Bellicism and Post-Bellicism in the next sections, these principles will be revisited through a critical lens, revealing their deeper contradictions.

The analysis draws primarily on Gleider Hernández's *International Law* (2022) and James Crawford's *The Creation of States in International Law* (2006). For secession specifically, Marcelo Kohen's edited volume *Secession: International Law Perspectives* (2006) is used.

Martti Koskenniemi's *From Apology to Utopia* (2005) is also cited for its exploration of the concept of sovereignty.

The “conceptual starting point” of modern IL is typically traced to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which formalised state sovereignty – removing papal authority and granting Protestant and Catholic states equal standing. As Hernández (2022, 5–6) notes, diplomacy predated Westphalia, but this period marked a shift toward a codified system of sovereign equality.

From 1648 to 1815, international law was grounded in natural law, drawing legitimacy from metaphysical principles (ibid., 6–8). This changed after the Napoleonic Wars, with the emergence of the *Concert of Europe* and the rise of legal positivism. Coined by Auguste Comte, positivism rejected natural law and held that valid legal norms derive from explicit state consent – through treaties or custom (ibid., 9–11).

A more ambitious legal turn followed World War I with the creation of the League of Nations, aimed at “organizing the life of international relations”. After its failure, the United Nations was established after the Second World War, and human rights began playing a central role in international legislation. (Ibid., 15–21.)

Further developments include humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), both of which challenge the sanctity of sovereignty. However, their application remains inconsistent and marginal. Meanwhile, the legal architecture of international law has expanded dramatically to meet the regulatory demands of globalisation, with subfields like international commercial and maritime law. While IL undoubtedly has utility and can yield positive outcomes, its foundations in state sovereignty pose latent structural dilemmas that limit the realisation of a just international order.

Two core features – sovereign equality and decentralised authority – have remained central to IL since Westphalia. According to Hernández (2022), sovereign equality means all states are treated as equal, regardless of population, size, or military power. Decentralised authority means no overarching sovereign exists to enforce law upon states.²³ Sovereignty, in this view, has both inward- and outward-facing dimensions: independence from other states, and

²³ Recall the metaphor from the prologue: states under international law are like a leap of leopards. The enforcement of any agreed-upon rules remains precarious without a Leviathan to keep them in line.

exclusive power to wield legal authority – by force if necessary – over internal subjects. (Ibid., 22–23). This concept of sovereignty is not only problematic but ultimately paradoxical.

Koskenniemi (2005), in *From Apology to Utopia*, critiques this paradox. He describes how international legal arguments oscillate between “apology” (overemphasising state sovereignty and rendering law powerless) and “utopia” (idealistic appeals to moral principles, detached from political realities). Because legal reasoning can be framed both ways, disputes cannot be resolved through law alone. IL’s supposed neutrality is thus a façade – deeply shaped by politics and power.

To illustrate, Koskenniemi contrasts Carl Schmitt and Hans Kelsen: for Schmitt, legal authority is subordinate to factual decisions – law follows power. Kelsen, by contrast, holds that legal norms precede factual power: the state as a juridical concept is distinct from the sociological one, and power cannot determine what *ought* to be. (Ibid., 226–227.) According to Koskenniemi, this tension is never resolved. Institutions like the International Court of Justice must pretend consensus exists where none does – or act as if disputed norms were once universally accepted. (Ibid., 301–302.) Koskenniemi’s analysis reveals deep tensions within the notion of sovereignty, raising serious questions about the extent to which international law’s legitimacy rests on principle rather than ideology.

Having explored the core paradox within international law, the next section turns to the legal mechanisms surrounding the creation of new states – including secession. While often overlooked in international relations, legal practice around state birth is crucial to understanding how the international order perpetuates its own logic under the guise of neutrality.

2.1.1 Creation of States in International Law

James Crawford’s *The Creation of States in International Law* (2006) remains the definitive work on the legal principles governing state formation. Frequently cited in secessionist scholarship, Crawford’s summary of post-1945 practice offers a comprehensive overview of the contemporary situation. (Ibid., 415.)

Crucially, Crawford argues that a majority vote within a territory does not confer a right to secede; unilateral secession is not recognised under international law. Even during

decolonisation, UN intervention occurred only when the parent state objected to independence. (Ibid., 417–418.)

Outside the colonial context, there is no post-1945 case in which a seceding territory has gained recognition without the consent of the parent state. Instead, self-determination is expected to be realised within the constitutional framework of the existing state. A state that is democratically governed and grants political participation to all groups is entitled to have its territorial integrity respected. This reflects the principle of internal self-determination, involving autonomy arrangements and cultural recognition within established borders – yet it explicitly excludes any right to external secession. (Ibid., 417–418.)

The limited legal codification on state creation can be understood through the contrasting *declaratory* and *constitutive* theories of statehood. The declaratory theory holds that a state becomes a legal entity upon fulfilling certain factual criteria, as outlined in the Montevideo Convention. In contrast, the constitutive theory maintains that a state does not legally exist until it is recognised by other states. In practice, the contemporary international system leans heavily toward the constitutive model: polities that meet all formal criteria may nonetheless be excluded from international society in the absence of sufficient recognition.²⁴

Recognition by other states – particularly the powerful ones – has become a de facto requirement for joining international institutions and exercising the full rights of sovereignty. Thus, while the Montevideo criteria remain the formal legal benchmark, the effective creation of a state today is shaped as much by political consensus as by legal principle.

Moving away from the general discussion on state birth, the next section turns to a more critical examination of how international law approaches secession specifically.

2.1.2 Secession in International Law

A key source for understanding the legal treatment of secession is *Secession: International Law Perspectives*, edited by Marcelo G. Kohen (2006). The volume, comprising contributions from eighteen leading scholars and practitioners, reflects diverse global perspectives (ibid.,

²⁴ For more on declaratory and constitutive theories and their relevance to secession, see Griffiths (2021, 17).

viii–ix). Notably, it highlights significant discord and ambiguity within international legal principles on secession.

Georges Abi-Saab's (2006, 474) contribution articulates a central insight: "secession... remains basically a phenomenon not regulated by international law". International law perceives the state as a "primary fact" – an entity whose existence is acknowledged only after its emergence, not actively governed by law. Thus, international law cannot dictate state formation but may only "encourage or discourage" its outcomes. (Ibid., 470.)

Abi-Saab further notes that international law intervenes only when core norms are violated. A state that systematically discriminates against segments of its population breaches the right to self-determination; a state formed through foreign aggression violates the prohibition on force. (Ibid., 472.) Outside such exceptions, secession is treated as a matter of domestic jurisdiction, with international actors bound by the principle of non-intervention, barring grave human rights concerns (ibid., 473).

Importantly, Abi-Saab clarifies that territorial integrity applies to relations between states, not necessarily to internal secessionist movements. Yet paradoxically, the United Nations Security Council has frequently invoked territorial integrity to condemn internal secessions. (Ibid., 474.) This reflects a deeper bias within international law: it privileges the preservation of existing states over the rights of secessionist groups, largely to prevent broader international conflicts. By maintaining secessions as "civil wars" rather than interstate wars, the system upholds stability – often at the cost of justice for minority groups. (Ibid., 476.)

Abi-Saab's analysis remains highly relevant today. Since the dissolutions of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia – cases treated as exceptional dissolutions rather than standard secessions – the emergence of new states has been rare. Even fewer have achieved widespread recognition or UN membership. This pattern suggests that the international legal order, whatever its original intentions, now functions primarily to uphold the status quo.

This overview demonstrates international law's limited utility in explaining or guiding the political realities of secession. It further motivates the turn to Bellicist theories of state formation, which offer a more historically grounded and materially honest account of the nature and persistence of states in the international order.

2.2 Bellicism: War Made the State and the State Made War

This section presents the core elements of Charles Tilly's Bellicist paradigm, which explains the development of the European-style centralised state that has become the global standard (Castañeda & Schneider 2017). In sharp contrast to international law's conception of statehood, Bellicism emphasises warfare as the central mechanism of state formation.

Tilly's theory, often classified under historical institutionalism or historical sociology, focuses on how historical processes and institutions co-evolve and shape state behaviour.²⁵ His foundational works include *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (1975), *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime* (1985), and *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (1992). For clarity and narrative coherence, I draw primarily from *Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change* (Castañeda & Schneider 2017), which compiles Tilly's key arguments and historical examples.

Tilly's framework has been widely applied across historical and regional contexts. While it remains largely uncontested, critiques tend to argue that war does not always produce states or that the model underemphasises ideological and nationalistic factors. These concerns are addressed in Chowdhury's reformulation (Section 2.3) and in the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) developed in Section 3.

Understanding Post-Bellicism requires a solid grasp of its Bellicist roots. Since Chowdhury (2018) does not expand much on Tilly's original theory, it will be presented here in some detail, including illustrative historical cases to retain the logic and depth of Tilly's exposition.

2.2.1 Bellicist Paradigm of State Formation

This sub-section lays out an in-depth introduction to Tilly's Bellicist Paradigm of State Formation, which serves as the foundation for this thesis's theoretical framework.

As summarised by Castañeda & Schneider (2017, 11), Tilly's central argument is not that states were created by "extraordinarily smart individuals with long-term designs," but rather that they emerged as an unintended by-product of banditry and war. According to Tilly, states

²⁵ For more on historical institutionalism, see Steinmo (2008).

are born from exploitation, war making, state making,²⁶ and “protection” – in the racketeering sense – of their populations (Ibid., 10–11; Tilly 2017a, 124). To grasp this, we must first understand what Tilly means by “protection”.

A core part of Tilly’s (2017a) argument is that state-making closely resembles organised crime: “Banditry, piracy, gangland rivalry, policing, and war making all belong on the same continuum” (ibid., 124). He compares governments to gangsters offering “protection” to shopkeepers – where failure to pay might result in violence from the very same group offering protection. The key difference lies in whether the provider controls the threat itself. A racketeer creates and protects from the same threat, while a legitimate protector does not. Ideally, a legitimate protector is one who “supplies reliable, low-priced shielding both from local racketeers and outside marauders.” According to this definition, Tilly argues, most government protection qualifies as racketeering. States often pose the greatest threat to their citizens while fabricating external threats to justify their own coercive power. (Ibid., 124–125).

What separates governments from common racketeers is their ability to monopolise violence under the banner of authority. Tilly notes that political theorists like Hobbes and Machiavelli already recognised that governments seek to organise and monopolise violence.²⁷ Whether this is legitimised by consent or not, the monopoly itself is central. In practice, competing authorities tend to side with whoever has the most formidable military capacity, out of fear or in pursuit of order.

This monopolisation of violence strengthens the coercive power of state-provided protection. Yet, as Tilly stresses, legitimacy doesn't rest solely on coercion. Rather, it supports the broader function of eliminating rival claimants to authority – a core function of “state-making”. (Ibid., 125–126.) By removing these rivals, the state maximises its capacity for resource extraction.

War-making enters the picture when a government seeks to expand or defend its extraction zone against rivals. This requires resources, which rulers acquired through coercion, asset sales, taxation, or financial ties to capitalists. The two strategies could be mixed as needed. (Ibid., 126). War-making was most effective when paired with state-making. As Tilly

²⁶ Tilly wrote “war making” and “state making” without a hyphen, whereas Chowdhury (2018) later used the hyphenated forms. Chowdhury’s notation is adopted in this thesis.

²⁷ For a similar observation, see Weber’s notion of “state monopoly of violence” (Weber 1946).

summarises: “War making, extraction, and capital accumulation interacted to shape European state-making” (ibid., 126). This interaction is his fundamental argument: European-style states arose not by design, but as a by-product of these processes. Variations among states arose from different concentrations of these mechanisms and the challenges each faced, such as resistance to taxation or the scale of military needs. (Ibid., 126.)

Tilly also examines how state violence became legitimate. Initially, the right to use violence was widely shared. Groups ranging from kings to outlaws fielded armies, often legitimised by different appeals. Their functional differences were minimal, and the lines between them blurry. States and outlaws even cooperated for centuries: kings hired pirates and bandits, and disbanded soldiers often became looters. Only later did standing armies emerge, necessitating the suppression of rival armed groups – a key part of becoming a “state”. (Ibid., 127–128.)

This monopoly of violence expanded significantly in 17th-century Western Europe. Great lords were demilitarised, their forces dismantled and castles destroyed – marking the shift from feudalism to absolutism. By the 18th century, monarchs had nearly consolidated the internal control of their territory. Final steps included extending central administration into local communities and establishing police forces loyal to the state rather than potential usurpers. (Ibid., 128–129.)

Returning to the theme of protection, Tilly draws on Frederic Lane’s work. Lane observed that with economies of scale, the state could a) extract tribute by charging more for protection than it cost to provide, and b) offer “protection rents” to those inside the system – particularly merchants shielded from outside competitors. (Ibid., 129.) This system became known as mercantilism, allowing both rulers and insiders to profit at the public’s expense.

Tilly categorises states based on their interest in tribute and protection rents. Jeffersonian democracies aim to minimise tribute and protection cost while maximising benefit to the ruled. Petty despotisms maximise tribute alone. Military juntas prioritise high military pay with little concern for public welfare. Tilly also points out that Lane did not identify the most common form today: a state owned by a dominant class that adjusts all variables to serve its

own interests. (Ibid., 129–130.) This insight remains central to understanding contemporary capitalist states.²⁸²⁹

Tilly then explains how different European states emerged based on the costs of the four violence-centric activities: war-making, state-making, protection, and extraction. War-making required armies and logistics; state-making required administration; protection fostered representative institutions; extraction produced taxation mechanisms. The more costly the activity, the greater its “organisational residue”. (Ibid., 134–135.) Small states with large military ambitions, like Brandenburg-Prussia, needed large bureaucracies to support them. Sweden succeeded despite poverty, owing to its demographic homogeneity and the relatively weak non-state wielders of power within its borders, while the Portuguese Empire collapsed under the weight of overbuilt institutions linked to its colonial ambitions. (Ibid., 134–135.)

Tilly (2017a) further identifies two mechanisms that help explain the variation in European state development: popular resistance, and the internal balance between war-making, state-making, extraction, and protection.

Popular resistance, particularly when allied with elite factions, often forced rulers to make lasting concessions that constrained future war-making and state-building efforts. The English Revolution of 1640 exemplifies this dynamic: when the peasantry and segments of the nobility jointly opposed the monarchy, the resulting institutional changes had more enduring effects than previous uprisings. (Ibid., 136–137.) This dynamic resembles what Chowdhury later describes as “bargaining” between the state and broader society – a key component of Post-Bellicism.

The second mechanism relates to how the various constellations of the four state functions shaped internal power structures. In Spain, extensive war-making occurred without strong state-building or extractive institutions, giving the military disproportionate influence over

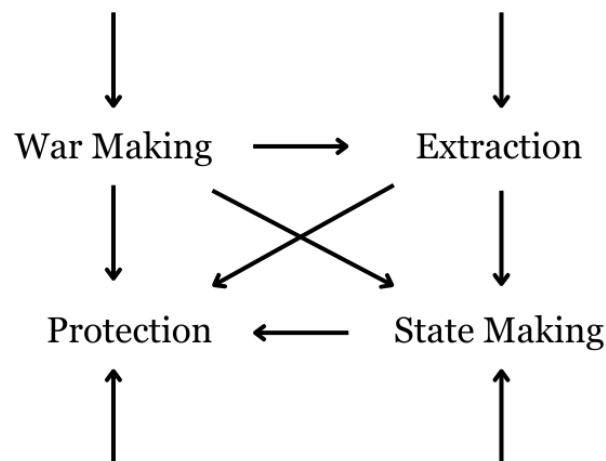
²⁸ The notion of state ownership is rather central to PBST, developed in chapter 4.

²⁹ Notably, Tilly references Lane’s speculation on the successive stages of capitalism, which aligns with the previously introduced logic. First, there is a period of anarchy and plunder. This is followed by a stage where tribute takers attract customers and establish monopolies by struggling to create exclusive, substantial states. Next, merchants and landlords begin to gain more from protection rents than governors do from tribute. Finally, a period emerges where technological changes surpass protection rents as the primary source of profit for entrepreneurs. (Tilly 2017a, 130.) This framework aligns with Marx’s analysis of historical shifts in class power, wherein the merchant class eventually surpassed the landowning class in wealth during the transformation from feudalism to capitalism (see Marx, 1867 [1990]). The pattern remains visible in the modern world, where the wealthiest individuals are business owners rather than government officials.

politics. In contrast, merchant-dominated states like Holland and Venice prioritised protection, resulting in commercial elites capturing the political system. The Papal State, meanwhile, exemplified a state heavily tilted toward administration and control, with relatively less focus on warfare or extraction. (Ibid., 136–137.)

Tilly adds that until the 20th century, states that failed to prioritise war-making generally disappeared through conquest. Only more recently have such states survived by relying on external assistance – borrowing, buying, or receiving the means of war from others (Ibid., 137).

*Figure 1. General causal pattern of classic European state-making.
Source: Adapted from Tilly (2017a, 135).*



Tilly concludes with a stylised sequence of state formation. A powerful warlord gains territory, seeks more resources, and eliminates internal rivals. In doing so, he builds bureaucracies for extraction and control. War-making improves state-making, and vice versa. As he consolidates power, he forges alliances with elite classes, trading protection for support. These processes shaped the diversity of European state forms (Ibid., 136–137).

These mechanisms are depicted in Figure 1, where the external pressures influencing all four processes are visible, with causal mechanisms emphasised. Notably, "war-making" drives all other activities, while "extraction" leads to both "state-making" and "protection". "State-making" contributes only to "protection," whereas "protection" does not directly influence any of the others. With Tilly's theory of state formation established, it is now necessary to examine two interconnected concepts central to his analysis: the exchange between rulers and the

ruled, and the costs of war. These insights further illuminate how state structures evolved and lay the groundwork for understanding their implications in the emergence of the international system.

2.2.2 War-Making and the Entanglement of Society and State

This sub-section introduces the second central element of Tilly's Bellicist paradigm: the bargaining mechanism. It forms a key bridge to the Post-Bellicist theory discussed in the next section.

Bargaining stems from the rising costs of war, which, due to the increasing destructiveness, forced rulers to expand bureaucratic structures to finance warfare. This, in turn, opened new opportunities for the ruled to place demands on the freedom of the ruler to wield the state's power as they wished.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Europe fragmented into countless feudal entities, locked in near-constant low-scale warfare. During this early "patrimonial" era, campaigns were brief and largely involved feudal levies and militias (Tilly 2017b, 141).

Over time, as states consolidated, warfare shifted: civilians were disarmed, wars grew larger and costlier, and states began to rely increasingly on taxation and bureaucratic administration. Tilly (2017b) describes how rising war costs pushed rulers into deeper reliance on landlords, merchants, and capitalists, whose interests gradually shaped state policy. By the early modern period, wars were no longer waged purely for dynastic ambition but increasingly justified in terms of "national interest" – a term that often concealed the priorities of dominant classes. (Ibid., 142.)

Three major developments accompanied this shift. First, the principle of balance of power emerged, aimed at preventing hegemonic dominance. Second, power parity and geographic proximity became key determinants of conflict likelihood. Third, national wealth constrained military capacity, reinforcing the dominance of major industrial powers. (Ibid., 142.)

As wars grew costlier and more rationalised, states relied increasingly on strategic calculations, weighing expected losses against potential gains. Dynastic legitimacy faded; instead, shared nationality became the principal justification for state action. (Ibid., 142.)

Another key dynamic was the interaction between war and internal instability. Religious unrest, succession crises, or defeats in war could weaken states internally, inviting external intervention. Simultaneously, burdens of taxation and conscription provoked popular resistance, particularly during prolonged conflicts. (Ibid., 143.)

Over time, civilian populations became more entangled with the state. During earlier phases, grievances targeted local officials such as tax collectors; later, citizens organised collectively through political movements to press demands on the central government. Tilly identifies this shift – mass engagement with state institutions – as “the defining activity of national states”. (Ibid., 143.)

This exchange between rulers and ruled – trading taxes, conscription, and loyalty for protection, rights, and influence – gradually embedded the population within the state structure. It expanded the pool of war-making resources but also constrained state authority over society.

The absence of such an exchange remains a defining weakness of many postcolonial states. As the next chapter will discuss, Tilly observes that attempts to replicate European-style states outside Europe largely failed, exposing deep structural flaws in the international system’s assumptions about state formation.

2.2.3 Exported but Not Internalised: The European-Style State in Postcolonial Nations

Before discussing the emergence of the modern international system, it is useful to recall Kenneth Waltz’s (1979) definition of a “system”:

“A system is a set of interacting units, where the interaction between units is structured, organized, and governed by rules, norms, and power relations, leading to a degree of regularity and predictability in behavior”

By Waltz’s definition, the European mechanisms of war-making and state-making created a system. However, this system was still regional rather than international until its later global expansion. Before exploring this, it is necessary to examine how states historically integrated into the European system, as outlined by Tilly (2017a).

Tilly (2017a) argues that early state-making blurred the line between internal and external authority, as the distinction between great lords and states was unclear. He identifies three interlocking dynamics that connected states to the broader European network: 1) the cross-border flow of war-making resources, 2) competition for contested territories, and 3) alliances and coalitions that often reshaped internal governance through external intervention. (Ibid., 137.)

After the Peace of Westphalia (1648), “all effective European states” participated in post-war settlements that determined new borders and leaderships (ibid., 137). In short, maximising war-making capacity required participation in the broader network of states.

According to Tilly (2017a, 138), organisations like the League of Nations and United Nations simply extended this European system globally, with decolonisation completing the process. However, the exportation of the European-style state did not replicate European conditions elsewhere. Instead, postcolonial states developed very different power distributions.³⁰

The crucial difference was the absence of the sustained interplay between rulers and civilian populations that had historically shaped European states. Postcolonial states “imported” military and administrative models from Europe without undergoing the same social bargaining process. As a result, elites often treated the state as an object for capture and exploitation, resembling the “military junta” model of state ownership discussed earlier. (Ibid., 138.)

Tilly (2017b) notes that Europe’s state-formation process led to consistent structural features across capitalist, mixed, and socialist systems: public services, legislatures, courts, bureaucracies, and standing armies (ibid., 145). Yet postcolonial states overwhelmingly developed along coercion-intensive lines. Colonialism left little domestic capital, and the most powerful institutions were the armed forces, Western companies, and churches.

³⁰ Old colonial areas were incorporated into the already worldwide European state system as independent but not nearly as efficient actors upon decolonisation. Even in the most charitable light, the creation of postcolonial states barely fulfils only the third step of the previous three-step process by which states joined the European international network – that is, formal inclusion in the system through external recognition.

Unlike European states, which gradually became integrated into the system through war-making, territorial competition, and coalition-building, postcolonial states were externally “certified” as independent without undergoing the same process. As a result, while they were incorporated into the international state system, they often lacked the institutional strength and internal consolidation that defined earlier European states. The system is thus better viewed as a “European” with a universal cover, instead of a truly “global” system.

Militaries often recruited regionally or ethnically, exacerbating internal divisions, while securing arms and funding through foreign alliances rather than domestic taxation (ibid., 148–149).

Since conquest was no longer internationally accepted, postcolonial armies focused inward – suppressing civilian populations rather than defending against external threats. This shift, Tilly argues, increased internal instability even as borders became more secure. Defining domestic groups as enemies fostered mass displacement and humanitarian crises. (Ibid., 149–150.)

Moreover, the rise of civil wars marks a distinct shift from European state formation. With conquest prohibited and interstate war made prohibitively costly by nuclear deterrence, the traditional mechanisms of state consolidation disappeared. (Ibid., 146, 152). Modern wars are largely internal.³¹

The result, Tilly observes, is that postcolonial states often maintain considerable state apparatuses without reciprocal taxation or political bargaining with citizens (ibid., 152). Unlike in Europe, where war-making demands eventually empowered the governed, postcolonial elites faced no similar pressures. They could sustain power through external support rather than internal mobilisation. (Ibid., 150.)

In Tilly's terms, postcolonial states focus on extraction and limited state-making without the war-driven exchanges that forged European governance. Their rulers, unlike medieval European lords, need not exchange concessions for survival.

This concludes the overview of Tilly's analysis: the grim origins of European-style states, and the even grimmer distortions produced by their global export. The next chapter turns to an even sharper lens: Arjun Chowdhury's Post-Bellicist theory.

2.3 Post-Bellicism: States, Incapable Yet Central

Having explored the historical emergence and global distortion of the European-style state through Bellicism, we now turn to Post-Bellicism. This perspective, developed by Arjun Chowdhury (2018) in *The Myth of International Order: Why Weak States Persist and Alternatives to the State Fade Away*, explains why states endure despite no longer fulfilling the

³¹ With the Russian invasion of Ukraine being, understandably, a peculiar exception.

functions that once justified their existence. This section is central to the thesis, as it offers the conceptual tools for understanding modern state failure and the underlying logics behind secession.

Chowdhury's argument – one that prompted the theoretical stance of this thesis – is encapsulated in the following passage:

Policymakers seem more, not less, invested in the survival of the state; as a United Nations (UN) commission examining the relevance of state sovereignty in an era of globalization would conclude: “[I]t is strongly arguable that effective and legitimate states remain the best way to ensure that the benefits of the internationalization of trade, investment, technology and communication will be equitably shared.” The irony, of course, is that “effective and legitimate states,” for all their purported benefits, remain the historical exception, and the continued emphasis on the state serves to close out alternatives that may, if given a chance, improve outcomes.

– Chowdhury A., in *The Myth of International Order*. (2018, 12-13.)

Building on Tilly's insights, Chowdhury integrates them with James Fearon's “bargaining model of war” to explain the strategic foundations of war-making (ibid., 26). He further refines this synthesis through his “informal rationalist model” and a “dynamic historical narrative” (ibid., 7), producing a framework for understanding both the rise of the European-style strong state and its failed diffusion globally.

Using this theoretical foundation, Chowdhury analyses the evolution of the state, exposing its structural limits and self-undermining tendencies. He challenges the widespread assumption that centralised, capable states are the bedrock of world politics. In reality, many contemporary states are fragile entities that fail to monopolise violence, maintain order, or uphold basic rights. (ibid., 1.) The result is a world system that clings to the fiction of a functional, equal international order – one which is arguably built upon a myth.

In addition to diagnosing the failures of the state-based international system in guaranteeing human rights, Chowdhury offers alternatives. His proposed models of global governance prioritise human rights over sovereignty, aiming to bypass the structural limitations of fragile states. These proposals critique the status quo and open space for imagining governance beyond the state.

This chapter introduces Chowdhury's analysis of persistent state weakness and its implications for postcolonial nations, development aid, human rights, and modern governance more broadly. It concludes with a presentation of his proposed alternatives and a return to international law, now viewed through a Post-Bellicist lens that highlights its structural obstructions to meaningful change.

2.3.1 The Self-Undermining State

The two driving questions behind Chowdhury's (2018) book are:

1. Why has the modern state consistently failed to fulfil its fundamental tasks?
2. Why, despite this incapacity, does the state – rather than some alternative institution– remain the central unit of world politics? (Ibid., 4.)

By addressing these questions, Chowdhury distils his core insights into a framework that can be readily applied to analysing contemporary statehood.

His central claim is that there exists a persistent gap between the demand for state services and the willingness to supply the sacrifices required for the state to meet those demands. This gap originates in the violent processes of European state formation, as theorised by Tilly: state capacity historically expanded in response to external threats – but only when those threats implied the possibility of *costly yet winnable wars*.

However, as the costs of war increased – especially with the rise of industrial warfare and later, nuclear deterrence – populations became less willing to bear the sacrifices required for war-making. This shift undermined the traditional state-society bargain that sustained state formation and opened the door to alternative models of governance.

Among these alternatives, Chowdhury highlights neoliberalism, which reimagines order through markets rather than coercive central authority. Although these alternatives often fail to deliver on their promises, they still reshape public expectations. Citizens begin demanding expanded state services – welfare, development, governance – while remaining unwilling to pay the material or political costs necessary for their provision. (Ibid., 4–6.)

In sum, Chowdhury argues that state-building (as in increasing the state's general capacity) is now more difficult than it was a century ago. The traditional mechanism – war-making – is

largely obsolete, yet popular expectations of state performance have increased. He summarises the paradox succinctly: “State weakness is quite simply the result of the standards of statehood increasing to a greater degree than popular willingness to sacrifice for the state”. (Ibid., 6.)

The core of Chowdhury’s theory of the *self-undermining state* rests on three interrelated claims:

1. The modern state operates as an ideally self-enforcing exchange between rulers and ruled, which requires both to prefer the state over available alternatives.
2. This exchange depended historically on conditions – war and empire – that are no longer viable.
3. As alternatives to the state emerge, and populations grow more averse to the sacrifices statehood demands, a persistent mismatch arises between what the state provides and what its population expects. (Ibid., 13–14.)

The following subchapters explore each of these elements in turn.

2.3.2 The Self-Enforcing Exchange

Chowdhury (2018) introduces the concept of the “ideal-typical modern state” to describe a system where the state monopolises violence, offers protection and services to its population, and in return, receives taxes and disarmament from the governed. Crucially, this exchange must be self-enforcing: no external actor may subsidise the government, ensuring that the state remains accountable to its own population. Chowdhury notes that this model underpins many international relations theories that assume an anarchic international system. (Ibid., 14.)

In contrast to Tilly’s emphasis on elite-state relations, Chowdhury focuses on the broader population. His reasoning lies in the fiscal demands of modern war-making: while elite contributions once sufficed, the 20th century’s large-scale wars required mass participation. This led to the rise of progressive taxation and conscription, with strong states today extracting 25–35 percent of GDP, compared to around 10 percent in 1900. Such capacity could only arise through direct engagement between state and society. (Ibid., 14–15, 102.)

Chowdhury applies a game-theoretic lens to model this exchange. For it to be self-enforcing, both parties – the central authority and the population – must prefer continued cooperation to their respective “outside options.” For the state, the temptation is repression or extraction without reciprocity; for the population, it is resistance, rearmament, or alliance with external actors. Table 1 outlines the possible outcomes:

Table 1. Possible outcomes. Source: Chowdhury (2018, 23).

	Central Authority Cooperates	Central Authority Defects
Population Cooperates	Exchange endures (stable state)	Tyranny (risk of eventual state failure)
Population Defects	No monopoly on violence (polycentric orders)	Civil war (state failure)

Chowdhury’s core claim is that stable, self-enforcing exchanges are historically rare. While many IR theories assume the modern state as the default unit, Chowdhury emphasises that rulers and ruled often have stronger incentives to defect. Armed populations can resist predation; governments may prefer unchecked extraction over service provision. As a result, states may remain weak, or never consolidate at all. Pre-modern empires frequently relied on intermediaries rather than direct rule, and many contemporary fragile states continue to function without a monopoly on violence. The self-enforcing state, then, is not a natural endpoint – it is one of many contingent outcomes. (Ibid., 2, 16–17.)

What, then, are the conditions that allow such a stable exchange to emerge?

2.3.3 The Conditions for Capable States: Costly but Winnable Wars

Returning to Tilly’s theory, Chowdhury (2018) highlights how local militias became obsolete as more centralized, professional warbands emerged. Effective defence increasingly required coordinated state-making, leading populations to disarm and rely on the central authority. Once disarmed, they lost the ability to rebel or form meaningful alliances with outside powers. This dynamic pushed the monopoly on violence toward the centre and drove state expansion. (Ibid., 17–18.)

As state survival depended on military efficiency, rulers were eventually compelled to recruit from wider social groups, granting rights to ensure support. But these concessions only held value if the threat of war was both serious and survivable. If defeat seemed inevitable, there was little incentive for populations to support the state, since they would not live to benefit from it. Conversely, if threats were minimal or easily repelled, state support was also weak – the population saw little need to sacrifice. (Ibid., 18.)

This dynamic creates what Chowdhury (2018) calls a positive feedback loop between the ruler and the ruled, where the existence of a costly but winnable war fosters greater trust in government. As trust grows, so does the willingness to supply the state, reinforcing its capacity to wage war. Crucially, the population also begins to accumulate material stakes in the state – such as access to public services, infrastructure, security, and economic opportunities – alongside hard-won political concessions. These gains raise the cost of defeat: a conquering power would likely not uphold the same rights, nor protect these material benefits. Instead, the annexed population would face not only political disenfranchisement but also economic hardship and the direct destruction brought by war. (Ibid., 18.)

Table 2. War and state-making. Source: Chowdhury (2018, 21).

	High Cost of War	Low Cost of War
Positive probability of victory	War likely; supply of state high	War likely; supply of state low
Very low/zero probability of victory	War unlikely; supply of state low	War unlikely; supply of state low

As Table 2 shows, only when war is both costly and winnable does the population commit fully to the state. If war is unwinnable, surrender is rational. If it's too easy, there's no pressure to mobilise. Chowdhury uses colonial wars to illustrate this: profitable, but fought without public mobilisation – often delegated to private actors like the East India Company. (Ibid., 19.)

This insight marks one of Chowdhury's most important refinements of Tilly's famous dictum: "War made the state, and the state made war." Not all wars build states. Only wars that rely on

conscription and taxation do – aligning with Clausewitz’s notion of “absolute war”, in which the entire state apparatus must mobilise for survival.³² (Ibid., 20.)

2.3.4 The Changing Parameters of War

Another central element in Chowdhury’s (2018) analysis is how the parameters of war have changed over time, leading up to the self-undermining of the state. Through historical examination, he shows that war-making and state-making have become more efficient – yet significantly more costly. What once constituted “total war” in earlier centuries pales in comparison to modern equivalents. While the Napoleonic Wars caused massive casualties, they did not pose an existential threat to all life on Earth – unlike today’s nuclear warfare.

As war has become more destructive, states have increasingly sought to limit war-making through treaties and non-aggression pacts. This creates what Chowdhury calls an endogenous limit to the self-enforcing exchange: a structural ceiling on how far the war-making–state-making process can go. Even without nuclear weapons, the escalating costs of conscription and taxation would have discouraged large-scale warfare. In this way, the self-restraining tendencies of states stem not only from technological developments (exogenous limits) but also from internal cost calculations. (Ibid., 21–22.)

These costs are shaped not only by material conditions but also by contemporary expectations about how wars will be fought – what Chowdhury calls the “rules of warfare.” One example comes from the First World War. At the war’s outset, many – including John Maynard Keynes – assumed that the conflict would be financed through debt, as in previous wars, and thus short-lived. But this assumption was wrong. Instead of running out of funds, the warring states drastically expanded their fiscal capacity. For example, in the UK, income tax rose from 5 percent in 1903 to 48 percent by 1923 and even up to 90.7 percent for top

³² Applying this to a contemporary case, the Russian invasion of Ukraine could be seen as state-making for Ukraine – despite substantial Western subsidies. Meanwhile, the war remains neither particularly costly nor clearly winnable for Russia, making it unlikely to increase its state supply. This dynamic is evident in how Ukraine must recruit from the general population – establishing a bargain (and facing resistance to conscription; see The New York Times [2024b]) – while also tackling corruption, a key aspect of state-making. In contrast, Russia mostly conscripts from poor peripheral villages (without broad mobilisation; see The Moscow Times [2022]; The Economist [2022]) or relies on mercenaries (see CEPA 2022), funding the war primarily through oil revenues rather than taxation.

earners during the Second World War. These wars gave birth to the modern income tax-based fiscal system. (Ibid., 24, 107.)

After the Second World War and the emergence of nuclear weapons, the logic of war shifted again. The possibility of nuclear annihilation made total war unwinnable and irrational. The function of the state thus transformed: rather than waging wars, it became a guarantor of peace through deterrence. Chowdhury (2018) refers to this transformation as a restaging of the state's role. (Ibid., 79.)

Chowdhury identifies two major restagings. First, the state recast itself as a deterrent force, maintaining nuclear arsenals not for use but as a means of preventing conflict. Second, it sought legitimacy through economic intervention, claiming the role of guarantor of growth and welfare. Both restagings, however, ultimately proved self-undermining – just as the war-making state had been before, though at a more accelerated pace.

The deterrence-based state, while paradoxical in nature, initially proved effective: it demanded far less sacrifice from the population than the war-making state. On one hand, it required the maintenance of a credible nuclear arsenal capable of total destruction; on the other, this arsenal could never be used without negating its purpose. Citizens were thus asked to support a defence apparatus whose legitimacy depended on inaction – weakening their political engagement and the broader state-society bargain.

The updated cost-benefit calculations of war in the nuclear age are summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3. War and state-making (as seen in Chowdhury 2018, 77)

	High cost of war	Low cost of war
Positive probability of victory	Wars of the people armed; supply of state high	Limited war; supply of state low
Very low/zero probability of victory	Nuclear war; supply of state low	War unlikely; supply of state low

The second restaging – the economic state – unravelled even more rapidly. By the late 20th century, neoliberalism had emerged as a powerful ideological alternative, promising

economic growth through deregulation, privatisation, and market logic. This new paradigm shifted expectations away from state-led provision and toward market efficiency, claiming to deliver progress without the burdens of taxation, bureaucracy, or collective investment. Although it often failed in practice, neoliberalism succeeded in undermining the perceived necessity of the state by reshaping expectations of order and legitimacy.

With these shifts in place, Chowdhury turns to the final component of his analysis: the rise of alternatives to the state.

2.3.5 The Emergence of Alternatives to the State

Chowdhury (2018) argues that because of this endogenous limit within the mechanism of "war makes states, and states make war", and the non-aggression treaties stemming from it – if complied with – will eventually lead to a decline in the willingness to supply the state. This decline would not be an issue if the demand for services decreased according to the willingness to supply, enabling the exchange to continue as self-enforcing, but that is hardly the case. Chowdhury notes how eventually, "in the absence of costly war, alternatives to the centralised state should emerge", which will lead to "the exchange to become undermined" as these alternatives promise another service, different from war-making, with a smaller level of sacrifice required in like manner. Chowdhury further notes that these alternatives are articulated via a political process; thus, his theoretical model cannot predict them. (Ibid., 23.)

One of these articulated alternatives was the rise of neoliberalism, as Chowdhury (2018) highlights in his historical analysis. In the absence of a costly but winnable war, neoliberalism was able to persuade broad audiences that state-mandated provision of goods was inefficient and that market mechanisms would be a more effective means of delivering essential services. It promised welfare at a lower cost than what the state could provide.

However, Chowdhury notes that neoliberalism conveniently ignored the classical economic liberal argument that markets fail to provide for the poorest. Instead of fulfilling its promise, neoliberalism failed to replace the state with market mechanisms. Rather than eliminating

the state, it widened the gap between the "expectations of order" and the willingness to supply the state, further destabilising the self-enforcing exchange.³³ (Ibid., 95.)

Chowdhury (2018) further argues that the state's self-undermining nature implies that the very process of state formation creates fertile ground for its alternatives. While state-making historically eliminated competing models, such as city-states, city leagues, and empires, it is no longer necessary for all political units to replicate the centralised nation-state model. (Ibid., 23.)

This leads us to the contemporary challenges of postcolonial states and their latest restaging – the provision of economic development, a task made increasingly difficult by the rise of alternative identities that serve as viable options to the state.

2.3.6 Customary Identities and the Postcolonial Gamble

As established earlier, the "strong" European-style state is eroding due to the absence of costly but winnable wars. However, this only tells part of the story. Most states today are not former war-making European powers but former colonies, and the picture looks even bleaker for them. Chowdhury (2018) emphasises how, in postcolonial states, the state-society exchange was never established to begin with. These states inherited what he calls a "non-exchange" – a structure that extracted without ever needing to bargain with its population.

During colonial rule, European empires built their power on racial hierarchies and extraction without reciprocity. Colonised populations were subjects, not citizens. They were governed indirectly, offered no real services, and denied any kind of state negotiation. This artificial lowering of the cost of European state-building, as Chowdhury notes, came at the expense of the colonised world – and left a distorted legacy. (Ibid., 137, 139.)

After independence, anti-colonial leaders rejected the idea of copying Western state-building, both for moral and material reasons. Replicating the war-driven state formation of Europe

³³ It could be helpful to refer to Tilly's theory of state ownership to examine how the wealthy elite has gradually 'tricked' the population into surrendering their negotiated benefits under the guise of economic efficiency. Furthermore, widespread inequality – exacerbated by neoliberal policies (see, for example, Piketty [2014]) – has reinforced the state's role in resisting 'globalism,' while leaving domestic inequalities unchallenged. These frustrations, rather than driving structural economic reform, are frequently exploited by right-wing populist movements, which redirect discontent into culture wars and nationalism, ensuring that the fundamental issues of rising inequality remain unaddressed (see, for example, Jay et al. [2019]).

would have required embracing the same violence they had just escaped – and acknowledging the racist narrative that framed the absence of statehood in the colonies as historical backwardness. (Ibid., 140–141.) Instead, many leaders sought to build legitimacy through development rather than war. Recognising that their states were too weak to stand alone economically, some even proposed regional federations or looser unions. But without shared struggle or external threat, these alternatives failed to generate internal loyalty or the sacrifices required to fund their institutions. (Ibid., 144, 146.)

The state-building “gamble,” as Chowdhury calls it, was that development itself would turn subjects into citizens. Through top-down investment, states hoped to earn legitimacy retroactively. (Ibid., 154.) But with no real exchange in place – no tax, no conscription – and little participation from below, this model remained one-sided. Leaders provided services with the help of international aid rather than through state-population bargaining. Meanwhile, traditional identities formed during anti-colonial struggles continued to function as rival sources of authority. (Ibid., 159–160.)

These “customary identities” had not been passive. Initially constructed by colonial administrators as tools of control – ethnic, religious, or tribal categories – they eventually became rallying points for anti-colonial resistance. Once mobilised, they didn’t vanish after independence. Instead, they persisted as political communities capable of pushing back against the state. They were, in essence, anti-statist: offering an “exit” of the state system into pre-modern ways of life. Furthermore, the identity groups claimed rights as groups, instead of as individuals as historically had occurred in the European state formation. (Ibid., 161, 170–171.)

This clashed directly with the postcolonial project. Leaders saw national unity and economic growth as dependent on transforming or sidelining these identities. But for many communities, the stakes were high. As Chowdhury puts it, “they would lose their history and get nothing in return.” (Ibid., 173.) Their resistance was not only cultural but political. These identities now had the capacity to organise insurgencies, in a way that had not been possible under colonial rule.

The legacy of colonial administrative divisions – combined with the absence of state-making wars – meant that instead of scattered rebellions, entire identity groups could now engage in

sustained, coordinated defiance. Chowdhury backs this with comparative data, showing how insurgencies grew in number, lasted longer, and increasingly ended in state defeat across the 19th and 20th centuries. Table 4 illustrates this sharp trend.

Table 4. Insurgencies in areas colonised by major European powers, then decolonised, 1800–2000. Source: Lyall and Wilson (2009) as cited in Chowdhury (2018).

Years of initiation	Number of insurgencies	Average duration (in years)	Media duration (in years)	Victory rate for state (%)
1800-1825	7	3.7	3	86
1826-1850	8	2.5	2	88
1851-1875	12	5.8	1	92
1876-1900	30	2.5	1	70
1901-1925	14	2.8	2	71
1926-1950	12	7.7	4	54
1951-1975	34	8.6	6	39
1976-2000	26	8.4	6	19

Insurgencies, then, are not an aberration in postcolonial states. They are a structural feature. Chowdhury's conclusion is stark: these states were handed independence, but not legitimacy – that, historically, had to be earned through sacrifice and exchange. With no war-making, no shared formation process, and no real leverage for populations to bargain, these states have struggled to hold together, not to mention develop efficiently. (Ibid., 187, 189.)

Understanding this dynamic – how expectations outpace willingness to supply the state – is vital for the Post-Bellicist framework. And before turning to Chowdhury's critique of human rights and state legitimacy, it is worth pausing here: most states never completed the exchange Europe took for granted. And some never even began.

2.3.7 Alternatives to the Postcolonial State and the Hope for Human Rights

Delivery

The problems of the postcolonial state, as laid out in earlier sections, stem not merely from mismanagement or corruption but from the historical conditions of their formation. This ties into their inability to produce human rights, which is supposedly their central function.

Chowdhury (2018) argues that weak states persist not because they are transitional or temporary but because the historical mechanism that made states in Europe – namely, costly but winnable wars – is no longer available. Without the demands of survival driving a reciprocal bargain between rulers and ruled, postcolonial states remain fundamentally hollow: expected to deliver ever-expanding services and rights without the capacity or popular backing to do so (Ibid., 218–219).

This tension becomes especially sharp when considering human rights. Chowdhury questions the assumption that centralised states are the natural or best guarantors of human rights. In his view, there was nothing inevitable about assigning that role to the state. Alternative governance models – federations, local assemblies, decentralised systems – could just as well fulfil the same purpose, potentially more effectively. But because human rights have become bound up with state legitimacy, the state is seen not only as a service provider but as the very precondition for rights to be realised. (Ibid., 192.)

This leads to a paradox: the modern state, originally forged through deeply exclusionary and violent processes, is now imagined as the universal vehicle for inclusion and rights. Chowdhury points out that the historical process of European state formation did not concern itself with those deemed “non-people” – such as colonised populations, women, or indigenous groups. These groups were not bargained with, and their inclusion in modern rights regimes is a recent and often fragile development (Ibid., 202–204). Yet when an apparatus of violence is built without bargaining, it does not automatically start producing human rights. It simply becomes one armed actor among many.

This becomes especially visible in post-conflict or weak states. Chowdhury examines how efforts of peacebuilding in the form of state-building are doomed to fail because they assume the state can be imposed from the top down. Human rights and peace are expected to flow from the consolidation of centralised power. (Ibid., 206–207.) Yet this assumed centralisation rarely reflects the realities on the ground, where multiple actors control territory and wield violence and whose interests must be accounted for to achieve peace (see, for example, Ghais 2019; Petrusek 2005). To declare one actor (the state) as legitimate and all others as

“insurgents” or “terrorists” often sets the stage for continued violence rather than resolution.³⁴

In response, Chowdhury outlines a more grounded and pragmatic alternative. Instead of prematurely disarming actors in the name of state monopoly, peace processes should begin by acknowledging all armed factions as political actors – treating them as part of the negotiation rather than obstacles to it. Chowdhury notes that similar logic applies to state formation just as much as to peace processes: the state must emerge from agreements between parties with real power, not be conjured into being by international decree (*Ibid.*, 206–207, 209).

This logic leads directly to Chowdhury’s proposals for alternative governance structures. He does not argue for the abolition of states, but rather for a decentring of them. Instead of pretending that weak centralised states are capable of fulfilling their functions, international actors should recognise – and work with – the structures that actually exist. These include tribal authorities, local governments, and trade networks. Chowdhury argues that decentralised, polycentric systems of governance may not look like ideal-typical Western states, but they may function more effectively in providing services, stability, and even rights than the top-down, enforced postcolonial states. (*Ibid.*, 221–222).

He proposes four concrete principles for replacing or supplementing weak state structures. First, governance should emerge through local bargains, not institutional templates imposed from abroad. Second, taxation and service provision should be linked at the local level – what Chowdhury calls “multiple tax units” – so that those who collect revenue are directly accountable to those they collect from (*Ibid.*, 224–225). Third, foreign aid should bypass central governments and go directly to local actors or populations, forcing a new set of bargains and creating pressure for more legitimate local governance (*Ibid.*, 220). Finally, peace enforcement should focus less on building states and more on brokering agreements between existing actors, with the understanding that federated or negotiated systems may prove more stable than centralised ones (*Ibid.*, 221–222).

What prevents this shift is not feasibility, but politics. State elites have little interest in decentralisation, since it threatens their monopoly over resources and international

³⁴ See, for example, Haspeslagh (2022).

recognition. Likewise, international organisations continue to funnel large amounts of financial resources through central states, even when those states are incapable of delivering sufficiently to their populations. (Ibid., 225).³⁵

In sum, Chowdhury challenges the ideological and institutional rigidity of the current international system. His argument is not that the state is obsolete, but that our fixation on centralised statehood as the only legitimate form of governance blocks better solutions. The true failure, in his view, is not just that postcolonial states are weak – but instead that the international system pretends to act as if they aren't.

2.4 International Law Reprise

With the Bellicist and Post-Bellicist theories now introduced, it is worthwhile to re-examine some of the foundational principles of international law.

The international legal regime, originally designed to regulate relations among European states in the 17th century and later globalised through colonial expansion (Hernández 2022, 5), appears even more problematic when analysed through the Post-Bellicist framework. Unlike Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), which critiques IL primarily as an unfair and exploitative system – particularly in economic and financial governance – the Post-Bellicist critique strikes at an even deeper level.³⁶

Rather than focusing solely on how IL has been used to entrench global inequalities, Post-Bellicism challenges the very ontology of IL: the flawed assumption that all states emerge through the same historical processes and can function under the same institutional model. TWAIL rightfully condemns IL's role in perpetuating neocolonial control, but Post-Bellicism questions whether state sovereignty was ever a viable foundation for a legal system that claims to govern political entities fundamentally different from the idealised model on which it was built.

A system built to regulate war-making units – where war was a legitimate instrument of international relations – is inherently ill-suited to later attempts to repurpose it as a peace-

³⁵ The nefarious ends of this resource allocation are taken into account in the development of PBST and discussed further there.

³⁶ For more on TWAIL, see, for example, Chimni (2006) or Gathii (2011).

preserving mechanism. While these efforts were undoubtedly made in good faith, they overlook the fundamental nature of the state itself. It is unrealistic to assume that states, originally forged through war, would willingly relinquish the very function that enabled their creation. This assumption directly contradicts the core functions of statehood as outlined in the Bellicist tradition: war-making, state-making, extraction, and protection.

If the international system had truly sought to prevent future wars, it could have promoted alternative governance structures rather than reinforcing state-based sovereignty. While an immediate dismantling of the state system would have been utopian – especially given Tilly’s insight into state ownership as a profitable structure for those already in power – a gradual transition could have been pursued. This could have involved a stronger emphasis on self-determination over sovereignty, fostering governance models that did not rely on centralised statehood.³⁷

Another central critique arises from the lack of key definitions in international law. While the Montevideo Convention established objective criteria for statehood, its practical application has been largely abandoned in favour of a recognition-based conception of statehood. This shift has created a paradox: entities that lack effective statehood – often labelled as “failed states” – retain the ability to determine whether or not de facto states receive de jure recognition. This has profound implications for secessionist movements, many of which have established functional de facto states yet remain unrecognized internationally. The continued denial of recognition to de facto states while maintaining recognition for non-functioning states arguably undermines the legitimacy of the international legal system itself.³⁸

This legal inconsistency extends beyond de facto states to stateless peoples, exposing further fundamental injustices. If international law truly sought to promote meaningful self-determination, people's self-identification would carry weight. Yet, under the contemporary legal regime, the consensus has been that it was secondary which country’s nationality a person held, so long as they had one – this would be enough to realise their human rights. This

³⁷ Sovereignty emerged as a legal and political principle during the war-driven formation of the first modern states, remaining fundamentally unchanged and continuing to serve as the foundation for the legitimacy of international law.

³⁸ This practice might lead to paradoxical situations where non de facto states get to deny de facto states their recognition.

assumption rests on the belief that all states are baseline democratic and committed to human rights.³⁹

A clear reflection of this mindset appears in a UN expert group tasked with improving statelessness statistics: “Where a person lacks any nationality, he or she cannot enjoy the rights and protections offered to citizens, limiting their access to healthcare, education, formal employment, participation in elections, and travel”.⁴⁰ While it is undeniable that citizenship offers greater legal protections, the assumption that all states provide equal conditions for their legal citizens collapses under the Post-Bellicist framework. If a group within a state has developed a distinct sense of otherness, it is more than likely that they face structural barriers – preventing them from fully exercising their culture, language, and economic opportunities on equal footing with other groups.⁴¹ Would it not be justified for them to pursue the realisation of their self-determination and human rights, when the existing state is unable or unwilling to deliver them?

Finally, it is worthwhile to revisit Koskenniemi’s (2005) discussion on “apology vs. utopia.” In his comparison of Kelsen’s and Schmitt’s contrasting views, he illustrates how, for Kelsen, law serves as the primary framework, with sovereignty functioning as a descriptive shorthand for state powers granted by law.

In contrast, for Schmitt, sovereignty is defined by decision-making power, particularly the ability to declare exceptions to the legal order, thereby making law secondary to power. Viewed through the Post-Bellicist framework, Kelsen and Schmitt can be understood as describing two distinct types of state structures: one that has engaged in extensive bargaining with its population, embedding sovereignty within a legal framework, and another where sovereignty remains concentrated in decision-making authority, detached from legal constraints.⁴²

³⁹ Recall how according to Crawford (2006, 417–418) the self-determination of groups is to be achieved by participating within the country’s constitutional system instead of secession, and how such a country in which administration is accessible to all and which is governed democratically is entitled to have its territorial integrity respected.

⁴⁰ EGRIS (2023, 8).

⁴¹ See Anderson (2006) *Imagined Communities*. This idea is further elaborated in depth in the next chapter of the thesis.

⁴² A “low-bargaining” state like this is, of course, far more politically volatile and susceptible to unrest and regime change. Postcolonial states typically fall into this category. The concept of the “bargaining levels” of states mentioned here is explored in depth in the next section as well.

As illustrated in Koskenniemi's (2005) analysis, international law struggles even to define the universal legal principles embedded within it, let alone apply them consistently in practice. From a Post-Bellicist perspective, this failure is ontological rather than merely procedural: it arises from the mistaken assumption that all states conform to the same ideal-type.

International law operates on an ontological fiction – that all states, regardless of their origins, possess equivalent structures, legitimacy, and functional capacities. However, Post-Bellicism rejects this assumption, emphasising that states are historically contingent war-making entities, whose existence and legitimacy stem not from legal recognition but from the violent processes that forged them.

Ironically, the democratic process – now cited as the foundation of sovereignty – only became widespread 200 to 300 years *after* the concept itself was established. Sovereignty was never designed for democratic governance; it was originally a tool to grant kings – effectively glorified warlords – free rein to consolidate power without foreign interference in state-making and extraction. Even more paradoxically, the human rights that supposedly justify the existing state system are less than a century old, yet states – historically the most effective violators of those rights – are the very entities entrusted with upholding them.

To sum up, while IL plays a role in regulating relations between consenting states, it is riddled with inconsistencies, flawed assumptions, and vested interests in preserving the status quo. Further engagement with IL is not pursued in this thesis, as it is demonstrably inadequate for offering meaningful insights into the nature of states, nor for explaining the phenomena of self-determination and secession, despite frequently claiming authority in these fields.

In the next chapter, the central implications of Bellicism and Post-Bellicism are summarised before operationalising them for the empirical analysis of secession.

2.5 Theory Summary

This theory chapter has highlighted critical inconsistencies embedded in international law, showing why it may be considered insufficient to justify its authoritative status within the international state-based system – even if fully enforced – and has instead put forward a Post-Bellicist framework as a more historically grounded alternative. By contrasting the juridical principles of the current legal regime with the historical realities of state formation and

function, this inadequacy becomes clear from a fresh perspective, adding to the existing body of critique.

In this section, the central insights of Bellicism and Post-Bellicism are briefly recapped. After this, in the next section, an overview of the current global situation is provided to consider if states are as efficient in their goal of providing human rights as claimed by the existing international regime.

Tilly's (2017a & 2017b) Bellicist paradigm of state formation and function reveals how the European-style state emerged unintentionally as warlords expanded their territories and aimed for greater efficiency in resource extraction. Central to this process were four interconnected mechanisms: war-making, state-making, extraction, and protection.

War-making involved expanding a warlord's sphere of influence, whereas state-making focused on eliminating internal competitors to enhance extraction efficiency. Historically, the boundary between external war-making and internal state-making was blurred. After the Peace of Westphalia, emerging European states mutually recognised each other's sovereignty, formally establishing the distinction between external and internal affairs. Sovereignty quickly became the cornerstone principle of foreign policy and subsequently the foundational doctrine of the contemporary international legal regime. This marked the onset of absolutism, where rulers solidified their authority at the expense of local power holders. Consequently, leaders could extract resources more directly, consolidating their power while offering protection in exchange to their subjects.

Chowdhury's (2018) Post-Bellicism highlights how, as war-making intensified, rulers increasingly engaged the general population in bargaining, exchanging political rights for support. The scarcer these resources became, the more essential it was for rulers to grant political concessions, thus securing the population's participation and cooperation. Consequently, ordinary citizens developed a stake in wars, as their newly acquired political rights depended on their ruler's continued power. Additionally, states cultivated alliances with the upper classes, who benefited directly from state-driven mercantilist policies, while simultaneously bargaining with the lower classes. Through European colonialism and later imperialism, this state model eventually spread worldwide, extending European influence and control to nearly every part of the globe.

Upon decolonisation, colonies and other administrative units of European empires were either granted independence or achieved it through struggle, significantly increasing the number of independent states. However, these newly independent states emerged without undergoing the essential historical processes of war-making and state-making that had been critical to the formation of the European states.

These new post-colonial states are recognised as independent, despite many being unable to monopolise violence within their borders, and even if they do, this monopoly isn't necessarily viewed as legitimate by their citizens. With the international commitment to preserving colonial-era borders, these states lack the incentives historically provided by war-making, removing the need for bargaining with their populations. Consequently, their legal legitimacy – largely dependent upon fulfilling duties such as protecting human rights – is fundamentally compromised. Without the pressures inherent in war-making, these states primarily focus on state-making and extraction, making them especially valuable instruments for those who gain control of state apparatuses.

In already “strong” states, public willingness to sustain the state has weakened as the costs of war have become prohibitively high – particularly with the advent of nuclear weapons, as Chowdhury (2018) highlights. The restaging of state purpose, first to deterrence and later to economic development, has failed to generate the necessary level of sacrifice. As a result, not only have the weakest post-colonial states remained fragile, but even the once-powerful states within the system have begun to decay.

With the theoretical foundations of Bellicism and Post-Bellicism established, the next step is to examine whether these dynamics appear in contemporary global trends. While the ensuing empirical review, relying on widely used global indexes, does not provide definitive proof of the theory's claims, it offers a suggestive glimpse into patterns that align with its critique. By assessing broad indicators such as civil liberties, sovereignty, and economic dependence, the section explores whether the modern state system functions as its legal principles suggest – or if, as theory predicts, it remains shaped by extraction, coercion, and structural fragility.

3 Review of Contemporary State Performance

As previously discussed, the international legal regime upholds the principle that a state's independence is justified by its ability to provide its people with access to constitutional processes.⁴³ The following section presents widely available data that, while limited in scope and interpretation, offers a broad overview of how this principle plays out in practice. Rather than serving as definitive proof, these indicators provide a tentative basis for assessing whether state sovereignty aligns with the realities of political participation and governance worldwide. The purpose of this review is to further motivate the alternative conception of statehood promoted by Post-Bellicism.

Figure 2 presents the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Civil Liberties Index, a component of its broader Democracy Index, which evaluates civil liberties across 167 countries. The index assesses freedoms such as expression, association, assembly, religion, movement, and personal security. While it has faced justified criticism for its neoliberal bias – such as its omission of social welfare measures – it still offers a general perspective on global disparities in civil liberties.⁴⁴

The 2023 index reveals significant regional differences. The highest-scoring states (dark blue) are concentrated in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania, while the lowest-scoring states (dark red) are primarily in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and parts of Asia, reflecting severe restrictions on freedoms. Russia and China stand out as authoritarian regimes with minimal civil liberties, whereas Latin America and Eastern Europe display a more varied pattern.

According to the EIU Civil Liberties Index (2023), a significant number of states score between 0 and 4, indicating severe restrictions on civil liberties. This corresponds with broader findings that over one-third of the global population (39.4%) lives under authoritarian rule (EIU 2024).

⁴³ As remarked by Crawford (2006, 417–418).

⁴⁴ The Civil Liberties Index is selected for examination instead of the Democracy Index to account for the possibility that constitutional processes may remain accessible to citizens through means other than democratic participation. For an in-depth examination of its methodology, see International IDEA (2020).

Figure 2. Civil liberties index, 2023. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2006–2023) processed by Our World in Data. Note: scores range from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating the highest level of civil liberties.

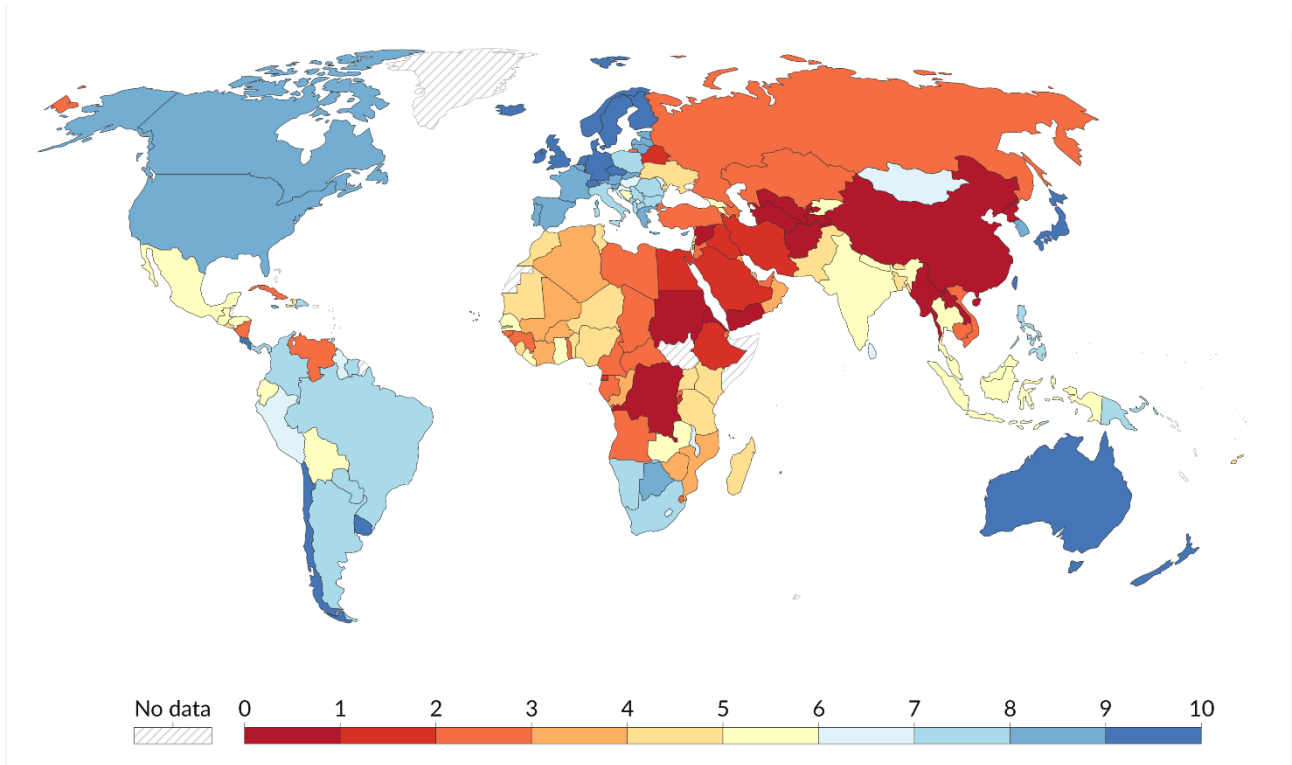
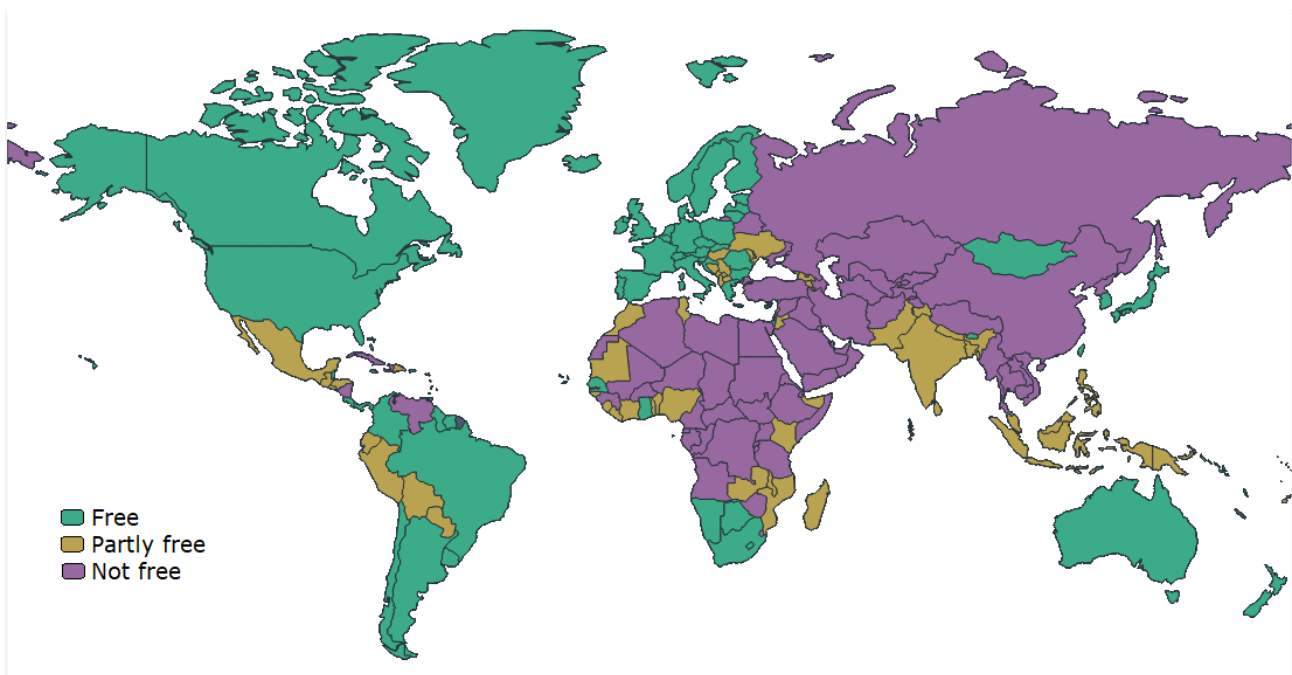


Figure 3. Global freedom status, 2025 (data from 2024). Source: Adapted from Freedom House (2025).



To complement the EIU's data, Figure 3 presents the Freedom House Global Freedom Status map. While Freedom House's methodology and assessment criteria lack transparency, its rankings receive widespread attention and carry political weight. In this classification, states are categorized as Free (green), Partly Free (yellow), or Not Free (purple). The global

distribution reveals a stark divide: Western Europe, North America, and Oceania are predominantly Free, whereas Russia, China, the Middle East, Central Asia, and much of Africa fall under the Not Free category. Latin America and Eastern Europe exhibit a mixed pattern, with some countries classified as Partly Free while others maintain full democratic freedoms.

This pattern closely mirrors the trends seen in Figure 2, which depicts the EIU's Civil Liberties Index. If general access to constitutional processes were truly a prerequisite for recognising a state's sovereignty, a significant number of existing states might not meet that standard.

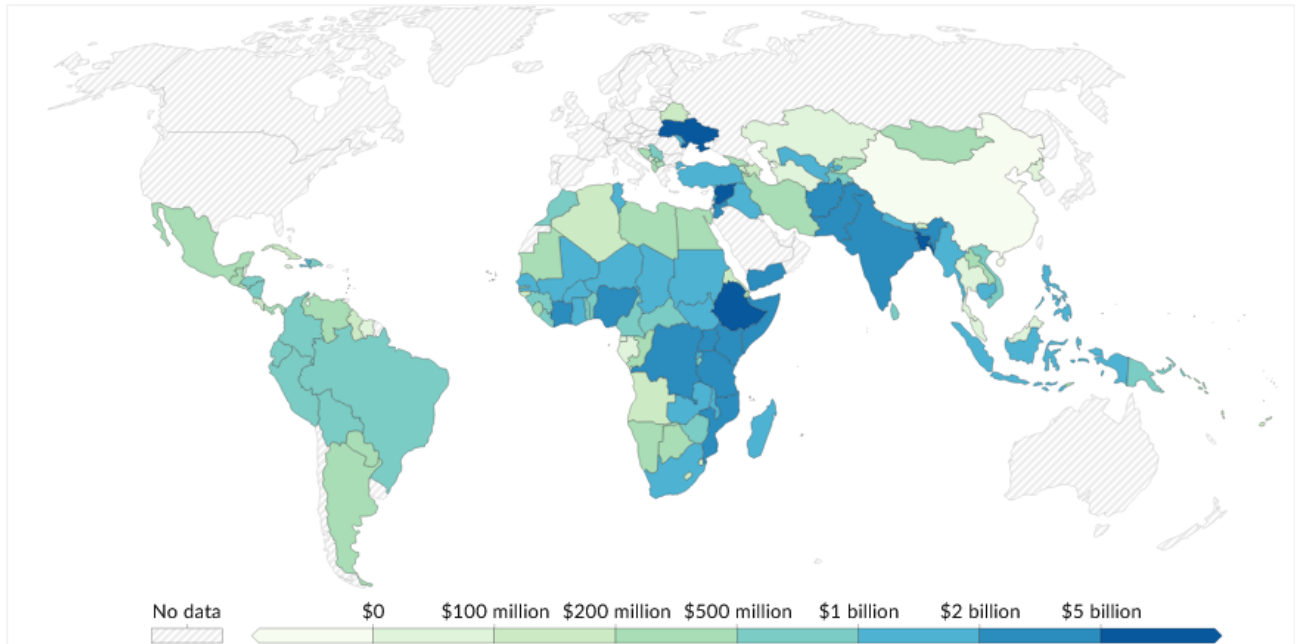
The promise of development for post-colonial states has largely failed to materialise. Rather than fostering self-sustaining growth, many of these states remain heavily reliant on Official Development Aid (ODA), which continues to account for a substantial share of the development being provided. In numerous African and post-colonial states, government budgets are overshadowed by external aid flows, reinforcing their dependence on foreign assistance rather than internal state capacity.

For instance, in 2022, Syria received 8.277 billion USD in development aid, while its government spending amounted to just 0.64 billion USD. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, government spending in 2023 stood at 5.27 billion USD, yet the previous year it received 3.250 billion USD in ODA. Afghanistan, another fragile state, received 3.893 billion USD in ODA in 2022, surpassing its 2023 government budget of 3.65 billion USD. Somalia, similarly, received 1.938 billion USD in ODA in 2022, whereas its government spending in 2023 was only 0.80 billion USD. Sudan, despite having a significantly larger government budget of 19.04 billion USD, still relied on 1.558 billion USD in ODA that same year. (The Global Economy, n.d.)

Figure 4 illustrates the global distribution of foreign aid received in 2023 (in constant 2022 USD), as visualized by Our World in Data. The highest aid recipients (marked in dark blue, indicating \$5 billion or more) are concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and parts of the Middle East – regions with longstanding economic vulnerabilities and persistent development challenges. Notably, countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria in Africa, along with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in South Asia, stand out as major aid recipients. Conversely, foreign aid flows to Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia tend to be lower or moderate in comparison. The map underscores the unequal global

distribution of aid and the continued dependence of many postcolonial states on external financial assistance. Ukraine emerges as an outlier due to the exceptional circumstances of the Russian invasion.

Figure 4. Foreign aid received, 2023. Source: Our World in Data (n.d.). Note: currency is constant 2022 USD.



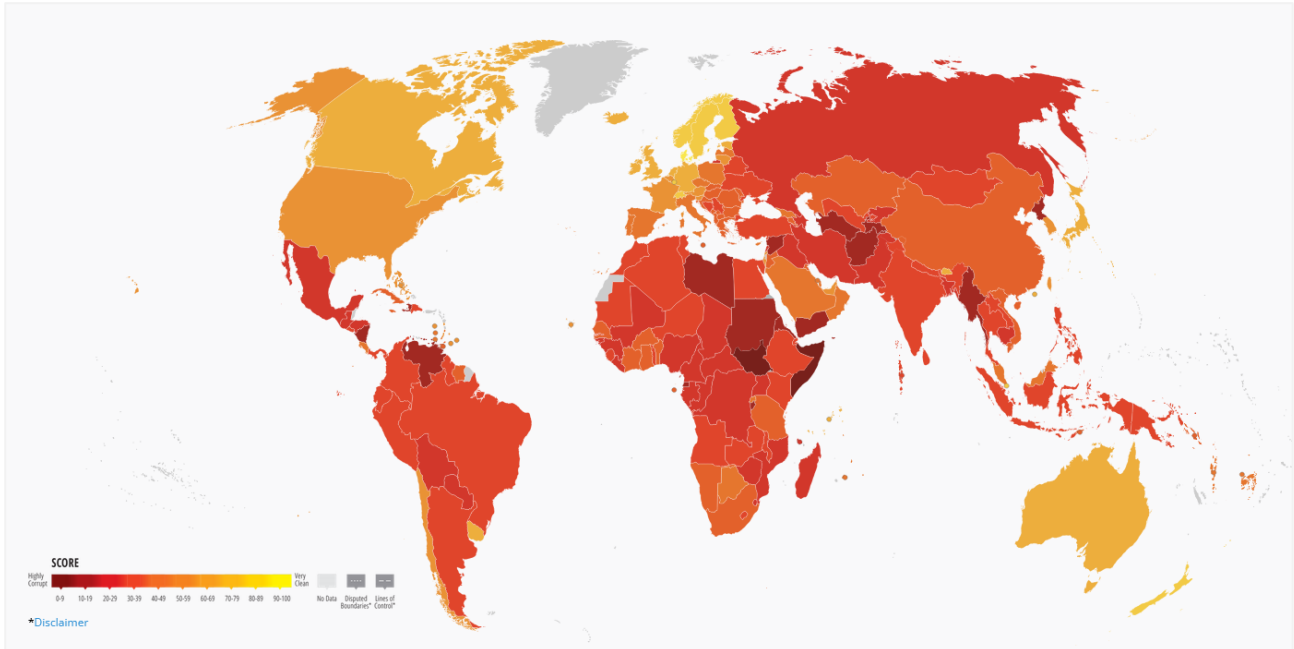
Despite the notion that states serve as the primary drivers of development, only 43% of Official Development Aid (ODA) commitments between 2010 and 2019 were channelled through recipient governments. Instead, 12.5% was directed through donor governments, 11% via multilateral organisations such as the UN and World Bank, and 8% through NGOs. The remainder was distributed through various channels, including the private sector, universities, think tanks, and public-private partnerships. (World Bank 2021, 28.)

The small percentage of ODA channelled directly through states becomes less surprising when viewed alongside Figure 5, which presents the 2024 International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) by Transparency International. In this index, brighter yellow indicates lower corruption, while darker red signifies higher corruption levels. A clear pattern emerges: fragile states tend to rank as more corrupt, with postcolonial states generally appearing in darker red, whereas Western countries are predominantly in brighter yellow.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ As with the other maps presented here, these scores should be interpreted as broad indicators rather than precise measurements. While the CPI is generally considered robust, it has notable limitations such as being perception-based and elite-biased. Additionally, its simplified scoring system may streamline the complexities of corruption too much. For more on the CPI's methodology, see Transparency International (2024).

Given this landscape, it is unsurprising that ODA donors prefer alternative distribution channels over direct transfers to recipient governments – despite the significant administrative costs associated with these workarounds.

Figure 5. International Corruption Perceptions Index 2024. Source: Transparency International (2025).



With much of development provision outsourced, what do postcolonial states allocate their own funds to instead?⁴⁶ According to the latest available World Bank data, the average military expenditure for African states stands at approximately 2.2% of GDP, with a median of 1.7%.⁴⁷ Yet, if postcolonial borders are considered unchangeable and war-making is officially denounced – and with police forces in place to maintain internal order – why do these states still allocate significant resources to their militaries?

Military budgets remain essential because, in many postcolonial de jure states, war-making has effectively merged with state-making. Official governments struggle to establish – or never succeeded in establishing – a monopoly on violence.

Viewed through a Post-Bellicist lens, postcolonial states function as expected. Corruption and inefficiency are not anomalies but structural outcomes in the absence of war-making.

⁴⁶ This is not to suggest that a significant portion of budgets is not allocated toward development, even if such spending is often plagued by inflated costs and ghost workers. For a striking example related to health and pharmaceuticals, see Garrett (2007).

⁴⁷ Military expenditure data varies from 1989 to 2023, though the vast majority of entries are from 2023. See World Bank (n.d.).

Without the historical mechanism that once forced rulers to bargain with their populations, there is little incentive for civilian oversight or public accountability.

This section has summarised both the theoretical core of Post-Bellicism and its explanatory relevance to the present state system. If formal independence alone were sufficient, conditions in the formerly colonised states would have improved by now. Their continued fragility underscores the need for something else.

Having established the inadequacy of international law, introduced the theoretical foundations of Bellicism and Post-Bellicism, and applied the latter to expose its deeper systemic flaws, the stage is now set. The following chapter presents the main contribution of this thesis: Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) and the new theoretical insights it offers.

4 Constructing the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory

This chapter carries out theory building required to answer the theoretical research question presented in the introduction:

- *T: “How can Post-Bellicism explain secession?”*

As stated, the aim is to construct a revised theoretical framework – Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) – that adapts Post-Bellicism to the phenomenon of secession. Once developed, PBST is operationalised to address the following two empirical research questions:

- *E1: Can material non-benefit and repression, as theorised in PBST, account for the emergence of secessionist movements?*
- *E2: Can extraction interests plausibly account for the stance parent states and external actors take toward independence attempts?*

These empirical questions are designed to assess whether PBST’s key variables offer a plausible explanation for the phenomenon of secession. The plausibility probing will be carried out in the analysis chapter.

A theory-building approach is necessary because the original Post-Bellicist framework was not originally developed to explain secession, but rather the broader phenomenon of state weakness. To adapt it to this new domain, the theory is extended by incorporating insights from Anderson’s (2006) *Imagined Communities* on identity formation to explain the nationalistic form secession commonly takes. These insights are briefly summarised in the process of theory construction. The result is a mid-level explanatory framework – Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) – designed specifically to explain the emergence and dynamics of secessionist movements.⁴⁸

As a more general remark on this fusion of theories, combining compatible theoretical insights into a unified explanatory framework is seen as a worthwhile objective, which, if done carefully, enables a more comprehensive understanding of the political world.

⁴⁸ For further information on “middle-range” theories, see the sociologist and founder of the concept, R. Merton (1968).

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 4.1 explains and justifies the incorporation of Anderson's theory of imagined communities, which is used to clarify why secessionist claims typically take a nationalist form. Section 4.2 introduces the core conceptual tools developed alongside PBST. Section 4.3 then presents Post-Bellicist Secession Theory in full, using a flowchart to illustrate its internal logic and causal pathways. With the theoretical model established, the thesis proceeds to Chapter 5, where PBST is operationalised for empirical analysis.

4.1 Incorporation of Imagined Communities into Post-Bellicism

This subsection briefly justifies the incorporation of Anderson's (2006) insights into PBST. Since his theory of imagined nations is widely known, it is not explored in depth here.

Anderson's conception of nationality – grounded in material conditions and historical construction – integrates seamlessly into the Post-Bellicist framework.⁴⁹ The synthesis of these two theories offers a grounded explanation not only for the conditions under which secessionist movements arise, but also for why such movements consistently take shape along nationalist lines, rather than other societal divisions like class or religion.

Borrowing from Anderson is essential to account for the *form* that secessionist claims tend to take, while Post-Bellicism explains the *why* of those claims.

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (2006) argues that nations – not states, importantly – are not primordial or natural entities, but socially constructed communities imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of the same collective, despite never having met most of its members. This act of imagination is made possible through shared cultural and institutional frameworks.

Anderson's (2006) argument is that this "imagining" is shaped by specific material and institutional conditions – particularly the spread of print capitalism, the bureaucratic practices of colonial states, and the standardising role of mass education systems. The rise of print media in vernacular languages enabled people to conceptualise themselves as part of

⁴⁹ The credit for the revelation of Anderson's Marxists underlying foundations is due to the nationalism scholar Anthony D. Smith (1998), who might have regarded Anderson's perspective on nationalism as a Marxist one, in order to dismiss it.

larger linguistic and political communities, while tools like the census, the map, and the museum helped standardise and reproduce these imagined identities across space and time. In this way, the form of the nation becomes intelligible not through ancient ethnic origins, but through modern administrative and communicative structures.⁵⁰

For the purposes of Post-Bellicist Secession Theory, Anderson's (2006) insights are not mobilised to explain the cause of secessionist movements, which PBST roots in failures of state-making and material dissatisfaction, but rather to clarify the form these movements tend to take. Anderson's theory helps explain why the language of nationalism – and not merely regionalism, tribalism, or class – becomes the dominant mode of identity politics within secessionist struggles.

With the justification for including Anderson's insights explored, the conceptual tools derived from Post-Bellicism necessary for understanding PBST are then presented before introducing the PBST itself.

4.2 Conceptual Tools to Explain Secession

To answer the theoretical research question – *How can Post-Bellicism explain secession?* – this section introduces four additional concepts developed during the formulation of PBST: *levels of bargaining*, *the violence cost buffer*, *state-unravelling*, and *baseline resistance*.

These tools emerged through sustained engagement with Bellicist and Post-Bellicist theory. While neither Tilly nor Chowdhury articulated them explicitly, each concept is logically derived from Post-Bellicist insights and proved essential for adapting the theory to explain secession. Without them, the framework lacked the necessary precision to account for how

⁵⁰ A compelling challenge to culture- and language-based explanations of nationalism is found in Anderson's (2006) insight that nationalism was originally an American invention. Creoles, who spoke the same language and shared the same culture as the imperial core, nevertheless revolted and forged new national identities. This demonstrates that when material interests demand it, even minor cultural distinctions – such as something as trivial as a preferred beverage – can be mobilized to construct a distinct identity. As further evidence, one could point to the existence of every distinct South American state – with the notable exception of Brazil, whose historical trajectory differs significantly from the rest.

secessionist movements arise, why they take the form they do, and how parent states and external actors⁵¹ respond.

The four conceptual tools are presented in turn, after which PBST is assembled and laid out as a coherent framework. The first of these is *levels of bargaining*.

4.2.1 Levels of Bargaining

PBST builds upon the bellicist premise that states emerge and endure by fulfilling four historically grounded functions: extraction, war-making, state-making, and protection. However, the extent to which a modern state continues to act in accordance with this logic depends on the institutional configuration of power – namely, the bargaining relationship between rulers and the ruled. This relationship shapes whether state behaviour aligns with long-term extractive rationality – and is rational state-logic-wise – or diverges into short-termism and personalistic rule, being irrational state-logic-wise.

To capture this variation, PBST introduces a typological distinction between high-bargaining and low-bargaining states. It should be noted that while treated here as a binary, in real world, the scale is a spectrum. Similarly, the measuring of the “bargaining level” of a state is difficult, and the distinction is mostly theoretical, with the bargaining levels of real-world states only estimated instead of measured. The levels of bargaining stem from the historical process which gave birth to states to begin with.⁵²

Over time, this process generates bargaining institutions – rules and structures that outlast individual leaders and constrain arbitrary extraction. The strength and durability of these institutions determine whether the state evolves into a high-bargaining or low-bargaining configuration.

⁵¹ Following Chowdhury’s broad use of the term in Post-Bellicism, “external actors” here refers to neighbouring states, international organisations, and other entities that possess extractive or strategic interests in the outcome of a secessionist movement, and hold sufficient capacity to materially influence its success or failure.

⁵² As recited, in Bellicist theory, bargaining originates in the demands of war-making. When states face existential threats from rivals of comparable strength, they must mobilise the broader population for defence. This participation grants the population leverage: they can negotiate political and economic concessions in exchange for their support. Once institutionalised, these concessions become embedded in law, bureaucracy, and governance expectations.

Below in Table 5 is an illustrative comparison of ideal-typical high-bargaining states and low-bargaining states in central dimensions of state structures.

Table 5. Core Structural Differences Between High-Bargaining and Low-Bargaining States. Source: Author's elaboration.

Dimension	High-Bargaining State	Low-Bargaining State
Institutional Structure	Deeply institutionalised; rule-based bureaucracy	Personalised or shallow; authority concentrated in individuals
Leadership Turnover	Regular, rule-governed (elections, party competition, legal norms)	Irregular; based on loyalty, coercion, or dynastic succession
Source of Authority	Legitimised through institutions and public accountability	Rooted in personal control over coercive apparatuses
Constraint on Ruler	Internal: courts, civil service, media, legal norms	Minimal internal checks; loyalty networks dominate
Time Horizon	Long-term; rulers anticipate institutional continuity	Short-term; survival depends on present control
Extraction Method	Negotiated: taxation, legal rents, concessions to public	Coercive: appropriation of wealth, clientelist redistribution
Ruler-State Relationship	Ruler is one actor within a broader apparatus	Ruler and state often indistinguishable
Policy Rationality	Structured around institutional self-preservation	Often driven by personal gain or regime survival
External Influence Within	Limited or diffuse	May be dominant in resource-rich postcolonial contexts

The key differences visible in Table 5 boil down to the ruler of a high-bargaining state being an actor within a broader system of the state, and thus having to align their actions with the reproductive logic of that system. Rationality in this context means not self-preservation of the ruler, but the preservation of the state's extractive and protective capacity at large over time.

In comparison, while low-bargaining states can act "rationally" in the sense of securing extraction, they likely do so with a limited institutional memory and without a long-term logic

of sustainability. Their rulers often pursue strategies that maximise short-term gain or immediate control, even at the expense of long-term state functionality.

Importantly, there is a certain identified condition under which even low-bargaining states have to act constrained. In some cases – especially in postcolonial contexts with valuable natural resources – the survival of the ruling regime depends on external actors, such as multinational corporations or foreign governments. These actors can impose external rationality by conditioning support on policies that preserve resource access and political stability. Thus, a low-bargaining state with strong external entanglements may behave more predictably than one without them. Where internal constraints are absent, external dependence can function as a substitute form of accountability.

With the concepts of high-bargaining and low-bargaining states established, it becomes possible to assess when a state might diverge from the extraction-maximising rationale of state logic. In such cases, its behaviour may fall outside the explanatory scope of PBST and be considered irrational.

Before turning to the next theoretical tool, a deeper clarification is needed on how bargaining level differs from state strength. While the two concepts are often correlated, they refer to distinct dimensions of statehood. The following section explores this distinction in more detail.

4.2.2 Weak and Strong States vs High-Bargaining and Low-Bargaining States

A further aspect that requires clarification is the distinction between strong states and weak states. As generally understood in IR, the variation between weak and strong states overlaps but is not equivalent to the distinction between high-bargaining and low-bargaining states introduced in this framework.

A strong state is one that possesses the capacity to extract, enforce, and administer; a weak state lacks such capacity. In contrast, a high-bargaining state is one in which the population plays a significant role in constraining the actions of rulers, while in a low-bargaining state, the population has little or no say in how the state is governed.

This conceptual separation allows for a theoretical mapping of state types by both capacity and bargaining structure. Table 6 below provides such a matrix. It also speculates how different state types would approach the production and delivery of human rights, and suggests illustrative examples.

Table 6. *Theoretical Typology of States by Strength and Bargaining Level. Source: Author's elaboration.*

State Strength	High-Bargaining	Low-Bargaining
Strong State	“Institutional State” Rulers are institutionally constrained	“Authoritarian Extractor” High enforcement capacity with minimal accountability
Approach to Human Rights	Capable and willing to deliver rights	Capable but may choose not to deliver rights
Illustrative Example	E.g. Germany, Finland	E.g. China, UAE
Weak State	“Transitional/Delegative Democracy” (Rare and Unstable)	“Personalist Fragile State”
Approach to Human Rights	Incapable of delivering rights, but generally refrains from violating them	Incapable of delivering and likely to infringe on negative rights
Illustrative Example	E.g. Tunisia (post-2011), Ukraine (pre-2022)	E.g. South Sudan, Central African Republic

As shown in Table 6, the “Institutional State” – strong and high-bargaining – represents the ideal type typically assumed in international law. This is the kind of state expected to uphold rights, maintain internal legitimacy, and participate responsibly in the international system. In contrast, “Authoritarian Extractors” are also strong states in terms of enforcement capacity, but they lack meaningful bargaining mechanisms. While they can deliver rights, they often choose not to, and their legitimacy tends to rest more on performance than participation.

On the weaker end of the typology are two state forms often overlooked by IL and IR theory, as discussed earlier. “Transitional” or “Delegative Democracies” are rare and unstable: these weak but high-bargaining states may be on a path toward strength, provided they gain sufficient material capacity. Lastly, “Personalist Fragile States” – typically postcolonial in origin – combine weak institutions with low bargaining capacity. As noted previously, these

states inherit a legacy of non-bargaining and are often unable or unwilling to deliver even basic rights.

To further clarify the mechanism of bargaining as a driver of state formation, the two following figures illustrate the core dynamics at play.

Figure 6 visualises the relationship between state capability, level of bargaining, and ruler freedom. As theorised in Post-Bellicism, European state formation was shaped by a simple imperative: bargain or perish. To build up war-making and state-making capacity (“State Capability” on the vertical axis), rulers had to engage in increasing levels of bargaining with their populations (horizontal axis on the left). As capability rose through bargaining, rulers simultaneously lost discretionary power – captured here as declining “Ruler Freedom” (dashed vertical line on the right). This trade-off, enforced by military necessity, steadily eroded personal rule and laid the foundation for institutional states. The “violence cost buffer” shown in the lower-left corner is discussed in the next sub-section.

Figure 6. *The Bargaining Path: Effects of Bargaining on State Capability and Ruler Freedom.* Source: Author’s elaboration.

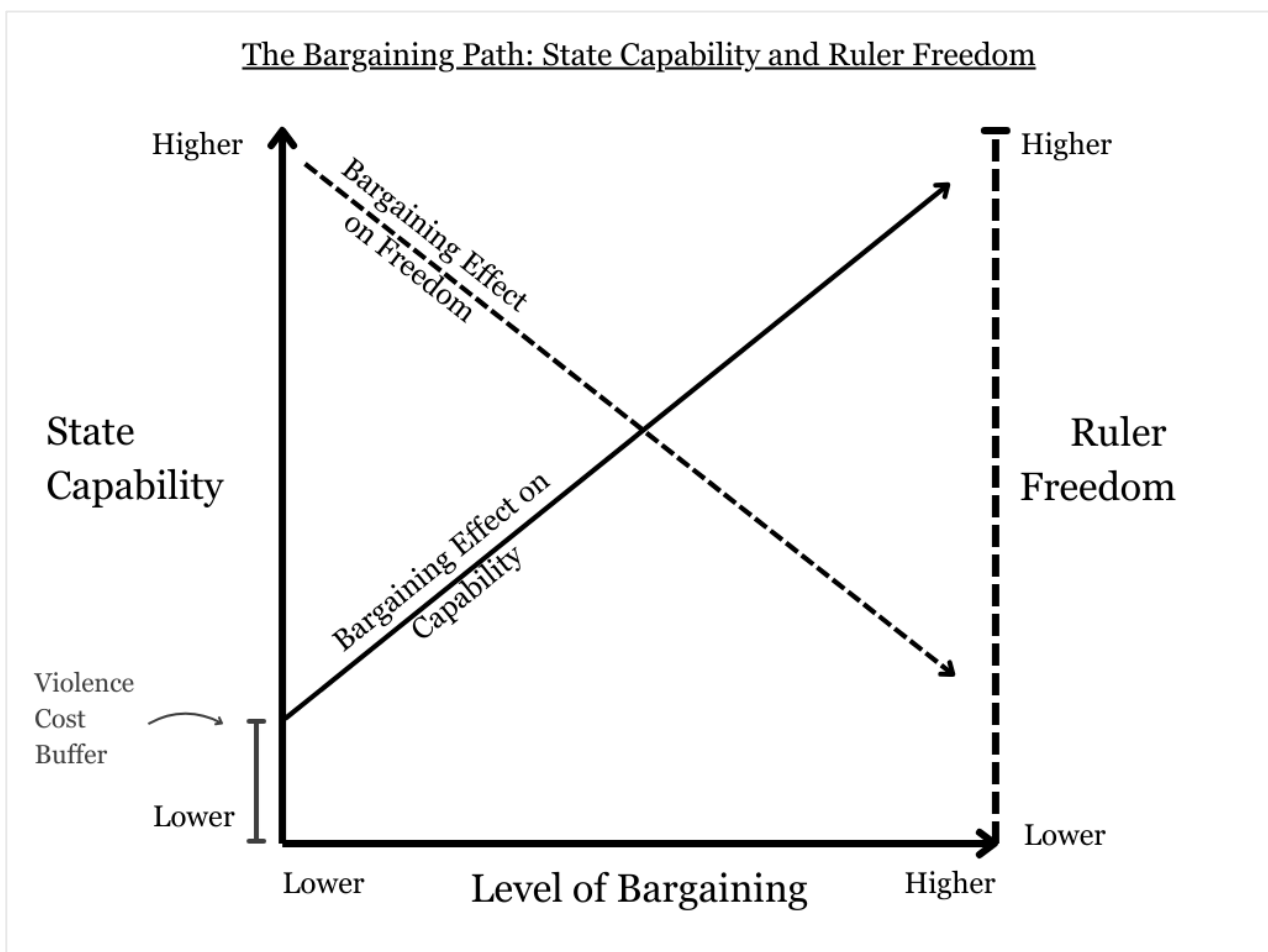


Figure 7. The Effects of Valuable Natural Resources (VNR) on Initial State Capability and Ruler Freedom. Source: Author's elaboration.

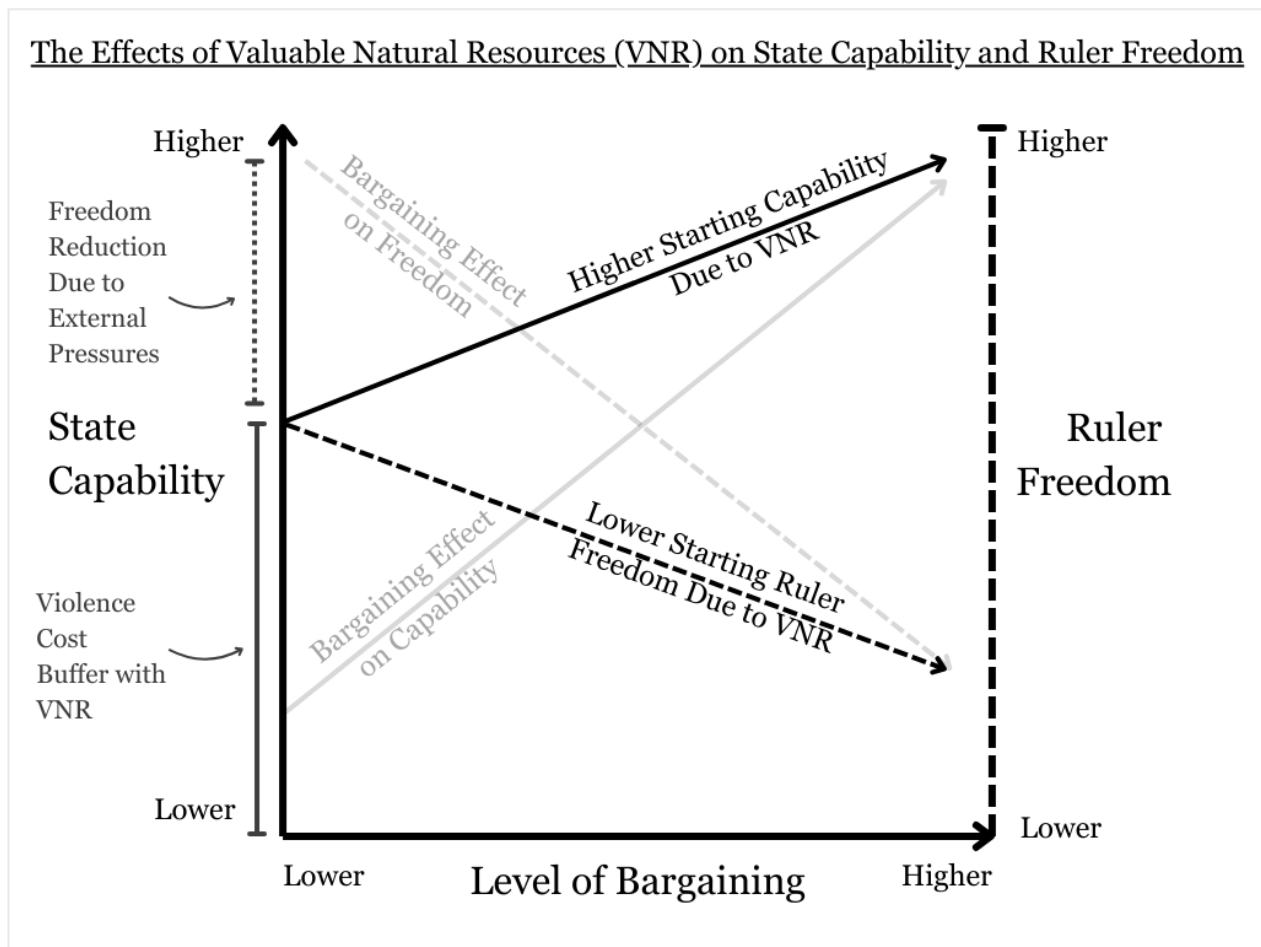


Figure 7 then shows how the possession of valuable natural resources (VNR) alters this dynamic.⁵³ A state endowed with such resources starts off with a significantly higher level of capability, even without bargaining, as VNR amplify the state's violence cost buffer. However, this boost comes at a price: rulers find their freedom more constrained from the outset, due to reliance on external capital and influence needed to monetise those resources. Due to the already high capacity, as well as considerably lowered ruler freedom, there is little incentive to bargain further. This divergence is even more pronounced in the current global context, where the absence of "costly but winnable" war has made the bargaining pathway largely obsolete.⁵⁴

⁵³ It should be noted that the values in Figure 7, as well as those in Figure 6 before, are illustrative approximations and do not represent exact or measured relationships between capability, ruler freedom, and bargaining.

⁵⁴ Even though the comparison between modern discoveries of oil and the collapse of the gold-reliant Spanish empire could be interesting.

As indicated, both figures include the term “violence cost buffer” – the second theoretical tool required for understanding PBST, which will now be elaborated.

4.2.3 Violence Cost Buffer

An effective state, by definition, maintains a monopoly on violence. But beyond monopoly, it must also sustain its capacity to project violence – typically in the form of an army and police force. The individuals recruited into these roles in low-bargaining conditions have typically been drawn from segments of the population with limited material security, for whom authoritative and risk-prone work remains relatively attractive. This allows the state to maintain a coercive apparatus without bargaining broadly with society.⁵⁵

As a result, populous states that have completed basic state-making can typically engage in low-cost wars using their standing forces. In contrast, smaller or fragmented states must mobilise the broader population – raising both economic and political costs by triggering new bargaining demands.

Because the apparatus of violence must be maintained regardless of use, it can be deployed opportunistically to pursue state interests, even when doing so yields limited marginal gains. This logic is particularly unrestrained in low-bargaining states: the legal and institutional boundaries on violence are minimal, and rulers face few internal constraints on how and where coercion is applied. In contrast, even the least privileged citizens in high-bargaining states tend to have more to lose, making them harder to conscript and less amenable to participation in repression.

This dynamic gives rise to what may be called a violence cost buffer: A threshold of pre-existing coercive capacity that allows the state to repress, discipline, or wage limited war without incurring new costs – as long as it relies on already-funded coercive forces.

The existence of this buffer has important implications for how states behave under pressure. Coercion appears “free” from the state’s perspective up to this point – violence does not register as a material cost until it requires reconfiguration, expansion, or redistribution of resources. This structural feature allows states, especially those with low bargaining

⁵⁵ Similar effect happens during hostile occupation – for example, the German army enlisted Soviet prisoners of war into its ranks, despite obvious ideological differences. See, for example, Grasmeyer (2021).

environments, to pursue repressive strategies with relative ease, delaying or entirely avoiding bargaining altogether.

Refer back to Figure 6 to see the state capability starting off relatively higher than bargaining. This illustrates the rent from the control of the monopoly of violence; the violence cost buffer. Now, refer to Figure 7, and compare how the violence cost buffer is illustrated as higher. This is due to the profits gained from selling valuable natural resources, which can be used to purchase far more powerful weapons for the selected few of state's troops, leading to asymmetrical warfare against poorer militias.⁵⁶

4.2.4 State-Unravelling

While both failed state-making and bargaining appear to reduce the power of the state, they do so in fundamentally different ways. In the former, the state loses legitimacy by failing to enforce its authority; in the latter, legitimacy may actually increase, as the state engages in a mutually recognised exchange with the population.

To clarify this distinction, this thesis introduces the concept of *state-unravelling*. It refers to a process in which a group within the state demands that the state withdraw from domains of social, economic, or territorial life – and the state is forced to comply. If the state is unable to reassert authority through successful state-making, control over those domains passes to a different locus of power.

This concept marks one of the more significant original contributions of the thesis. While Bellicist theory has long focused on the birth of states and the conditions under which state formation occurs or fails, it has largely ignored the process of unmaking – of states being structurally undone from within.

Importantly, state-unravelling presupposes the prior existence of a functioning state. It should not be confused with conventional “state failure,” which often refers to externally imposed state-building attempts that collapse due to lack of internal legitimacy. State-unravelling begins from an established structure.

⁵⁶This is what occurred in the Sudan – (to be) South-Sudan civil war. Sudanese army focused its efforts to control the oil fields in the South, only to buy advanced war machines – namely Russian attack helicopters – to more efficiently wage more war against other militias contesting other oil fields. See Human Rights Watch (2003).

PBST identifies three primary mechanisms through which the process of state-unravelling can occur:

1. *Insurrectionary unravelling* – when an internal actor successfully challenges the state’s monopoly on violence in a given territory. The state is locally unravelled, and must shift from state-making to war-making to reassert control.
2. *Strategic unravelling* – when the state voluntarily withdraws from governance in a domain due to a credible threat. This may be territorial, social, or economic. The state calculates that the cost of continued control outweighs the benefits or risks broader collapse.
3. *Institutional unravelling* – when an economically dominant class captures the state and dismantles it from within. Governance in areas such as health, housing, or finance is transferred to private actors, often under the guise of legitimate policy. The state’s bargaining relationship with the population is replaced by opaque elite arrangements.

Secessionist movements may trigger insurrectionary or strategic unravelling, depending on their tactics. But notably, they never trigger the third form. Institutional unravelling is by far the most devious – and the most permanent.

Here, Chowdhury’s distinction between bargaining with the population and bargaining with elites becomes useful. A state that bypasses the population and bargains only with elites reduces the majority to the status of forcibly mobilised labourers (Chowdhury 2018, 33–34) – or, put differently, pyramid builders. This logic parallels Tilly’s observation of the fourth form of government: one in which the state is captured by a dominant class and governed in its interests, not in those of the population (Tilly 2017a, 129–130).

Institutional unravelling often appears legitimate – it wears the clothing of reform. But unlike temporary losses of control, which can be reversed through war-making or bargaining, it creates lasting structural deterioration. Without an active bureaucratic class or political will, the state becomes difficult to recover. Its absence is no longer contested; it is normalised.

By contrast, bargaining is a sign not of weakness, but of strategic adaptation. The state adjusts its extraction downward or its service provision upward in exchange for support –

often in the face of external threats. In doing so, it preserves long-term extraction by embedding legitimacy.

In short: Failed state-making causes state-unravelling. Failed bargaining – under the threat of costly but winnable war – causes the state to be conquered.

Successful state-making prevents state-unravelling. Successful bargaining – under conditions of costly but winnable war – creates strong states.⁵⁷

Lastly, the theoretical concept of “baseline resistance” is introduced before laying out the PBST.

4.2.5 Baseline Resistance to Secession

An additional latent factor influencing states’ reactions to secession attempts stems directly from Post-Bellicist logic. As previously established, a group may begin imagining itself as a distinct “people” either due to direct repression, the absence of material benefit from the state,⁵⁸ or both. While the potential for secessionist aspirations is evident within empires, it can also arise in states whose institutions are poorly designed or significantly undermined, leading populations to recognise their disadvantaged position. Every state has the latent potential of becoming an empire within its own borders.

This explains the importance states place on national symbols and unified schooling systems, particularly when institutions favour distinct groups. States might not consciously realise this vulnerability, but their actions suggest a tacit awareness – a dynamic observable through Anderson’s (2006) analysis. He shows how states construct historical narratives that present themselves as the inevitable culmination of political development, offering citizens the chance to “tap into” a sense of eternity by belonging to the state (Anderson 2006, 9–12).

For this reason, the very idea of secession occurring anywhere is deeply uncomfortable for states. It challenges the foundational narratives that help mask the lived contradictions of the

⁵⁷ Over time, sufficient state-unravelling may shift the strategic environment, altering wars between categories as defined in Chowdhury’s framework. With sufficient state-unravelling, wars that would previously have been winnable and not costly may become costly but winnable. Furthermore, wars that had previously been costly but winnable may become costly and unwinnable due to the decrease in war-making capability of the state.

⁵⁸ This perception may be based on information which is true, false, or somewhere in between, but it is often born as a result of elite agitation.

state and enable the imagination of the nation that states claim to represent. Even when there is no material reason to oppose a secession, it is theorised here that states exhibit a baseline opposition to secession and the disruption it represents to the supposedly eternal status quo of statehood. This may also explain why recognition is often withheld even by non-involved states: to legitimise secession elsewhere would be to acknowledge the fragility of their own position.

Overcoming this baseline resistance requires material factors of sufficient weight. An otherwise neutral external actor will support secession only if the resulting outcome significantly weakens a rival's war-making capability, and if potential spillover risks into its own territory do not outweigh the strategic benefit. Moreover, the actor must anticipate no significant disruptions to its own extractive access or interests resulting from the secession.⁵⁹

Now that the necessary theoretical tools have been laid out, the full Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) can be introduced.

4.3 Post-Bellicist Secession Theory

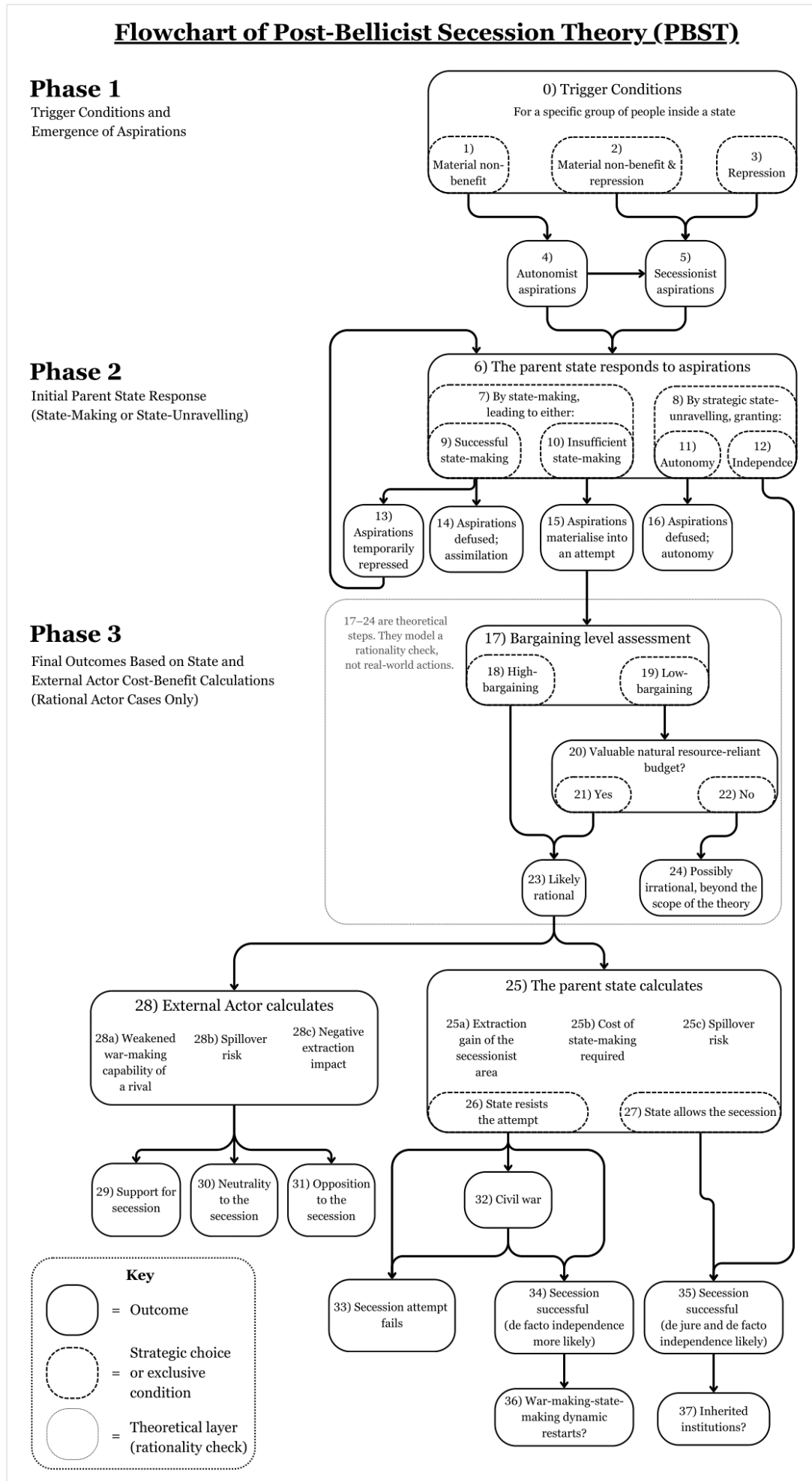
This thesis develops the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) through a deductive process of theoretical adaptation and extension. According to Shoemaker, Tankard, and Lasorsa (2004), a theory constitutes a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that systematically explain phenomena by specifying relationships among variables. PBST fulfils this criterion by synthesising concepts from Bellicism, Post-Bellicism, and the theory of imagined communities, and reorganising them into a coherent explanatory framework specifically designed to address the formation of secessionist movements and the reactions of parent states and external actors.

Rather than emerging inductively from new empirical material, PBST is a deductive theoretical innovation: it adapts existing explanatory mechanisms to a new domain, thereby providing a historically grounded yet distinct lens for understanding contemporary secessionism. The theory constructs a clear set of concepts, defines their operational meanings, specifies

⁵⁹ Notably, even appeals to “democracy” or the “promotion of human rights” appear to carry little weight in these calculations to support or oppose a secession, despite often being presented as core justifications in public discourse.

causal propositions, and delimits its scope conditions, in line with the structure of theory-building outlined by Shoemaker et al. (2004).

The flowchart in Figure 8 displays three Phases, each vital in explaining the phenomenon of secession starting from the trigger conditions of secessionist aspirations (Phase 1), the parent state's responses to rising aspirations (Phase 2), as well as the parent state's and external actors' reactions to the secessionist attempt (Phase 3). Each phase is discussed in more detail below, with a reference to the numbered part of the flowchart for the most straightforward explanation.



4.3.1 Birth of a Secession

For secessionist aspirations to commence, PBST identifies three trigger conditions (0) numbered (1–3) in the Phase 1 portion of Figure 8. The first one is material non-benefit (1), which refers to whether a state persistently extracts resources from a region without adequately providing essential services in return. Extraction, as defined by Bellicism, is the state's core function – indeed, the very reason for its historical formation. However, when the state fails to offer sufficient services in exchange for extraction, its actions increasingly appear unjust to the affected population.⁶⁰ Under the conditions of material non-benefit (1), the aspirations are more likely to be autonomist at first, but they can easily develop into secessionist aspirations (5) once formed, even if there is no repression (1) involved.

Repression constitutes the failure of the protection function – the most fundamental justification for the state's existence. Regardless of the shifting service that historically serves as the justification for the state, protection remains the fundamental one. Without it, citizens are incentivised to establish protection on their own, undermining the state's monopoly on violence and, in turn, its ability to extract. This ties into the second (2) and third (3) variables in trigger conditions for secessionist aspirations. If the state does not provide security, and instead represses in a way which amounts to war-like conditions, there is no incentive to supply such a state. If the state represses (2) or is both materially non-beneficial and represses (3), this will lead to secessionist aspirations being born (5).

Over time, the exploitative relationship becomes untenable, and residents of the affected region increasingly perceive their continued association with the state as both costly and harmful. With either autonomist aspirations (4) or secessionist aspirations (5) in place, the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of the Figure commences. At this point, the autonomist or secessionist people recognise and imagine themselves as a distinct people, apart from that which the state claims to represent – a process grounded in shared experience and collective interpretation of injustice.⁶¹

⁶⁰ According to Chowdhury's Post-Bellicism, the specific service a state is expected to provide depends on how its purpose is framed or justified in the given historical context.

⁶¹ Chowdhury identified a similar dynamic in tribal or traditional identities, which typically did not aim to build an alternative state but rather sought to abandon the modernist state project altogether. Under contemporary

Finally, this collective mobilisation leads to Phase 2: initial parent state response. The state has two strategies for response (6). It can either respond by state-making (7) or by strategic state-unravelling (8). The former (7) can either lead to successful state-making (9), which comes in two forms: the aspirations being temporarily repressed (13), looping back to the parent state having to deal with the aspirations again in the future (6). Alternatively, the parent state can defuse the aspirations by assimilating the secessionist people (14).⁶²

Should state-making (7) be insufficient (10), this leads to aspirations materialising into a secessionist attempt (15), which in turn leads to Phase 3. Alternatively, the outcomes of strategic state-unravelling (8) can be either granting the secessionist peoples autonomy (11), which leads to the aspirations being defused due to autonomy (16). Notably, it would be possible that the autonomy remains insufficient, or eventually becomes viewed as insufficient, which leads to the situation reverting back to the state having to respond to the aspirations (this is not pictured in the flowchart). The state can also decide to unravel (8) by granting the secessionist movement independence (12), which will likely lead to the secession becoming successful (35) with de jure and de facto independence.

4.3.2 Secessionist Attempt and Rationality Check

The likely outcome of insufficient state-making (10) is the materialisation of a secessionist attempt (15), which triggers Phase 3. For PBST and the scope of this thesis, a secessionist attempt is defined as the culmination of an effective secessionist movement into a declaration or referendum that can be interpreted as representing the will of the majority (over 50 percent of the eligible voting population) of those who would become citizens of the new state. Referendums and parliamentary declarations typically meet this criterion.

In contrast, between secessionist aspirations (5) – and autonomist aspirations (4) – and the aspirations materialising (15), there is typically *a secessionist movement* advancing the secessionist aspirations (not modelled in the flowchart). PBST defines a secessionist

conditions, however, this group of extraction-losers typically articulates its grievances as a nationalist project, organised along administrative, linguistic, or cultural lines.

This may be largely due to the unfeasibility of returning to traditional lifestyles, as modernism has reshaped ecosystems that can no longer sustain large human populations.

⁶² This could mean ensured minority representation within the state, policy change towards the secessionist people, or economic benefits, for example. Either way, the trigger conditions for secessionism need to be addressed.

movement as emerging when a group actively begins to advance the secessionist cause, distinguishing it from mere aspirations.⁶³ Casual discussion, such as informal conversations about independence, does not qualify; activity begins when individuals organise in any meaningful way, however minor. This distinction allows PBST to differentiate latent aspirations from active mobilisation.⁶⁴

As the aspirations materialise into an attempt (15), the following theoretical step of *rationality check* is modelled (numbers 17–24). Rationality check is purely theoretical, and it does not model real-world actions of any actors. It can and should be applied to both parent states and external actors. Starting with the bargaining level assessment (17), the actor is either evaluated to be high-bargaining (18) or low-bargaining (19). If the actor is high-bargaining (18), it is considered likely rational (23). This is due to the institutional restraints placed on the ruler's freedom, with great emphasis on institutional continuity, as theorised earlier.

Should the actor be low-bargaining (19), it should be examined whether the actor has a valuable natural resource-reliant budget (20). Should it have one (21), the external constraints on the ruler's freedom apply, in addition to the state's increased capability being dependent on the external revenue, as theorised earlier, the low-bargaining state is likely rational (23). If this is not the case (22), the actor is treated as beyond the explanatory scope of PBST (24) – possibly irrational, or operating under unknown constraints.⁶⁵

⁶³ A secessionist movement can exist even without a valid material grievance; however, PBST posits that movements lacking real material foundations are unlikely to sustain meaningful mobilisation.

⁶⁴ The question of whether a secessionist movement must be effective to be considered as truly existing arises naturally here. For example: a group may read every book on secessionism they wish, but it is difficult to see how that alone could bring about the aspired outcome.

One could argue that movements should be judged by their ability to force a reaction from the parent state or to impose plausible costs if ignored. Under such a definition, even a small group using terrorist tactics could be seen as "effective," while a mass, lawful movement could be disregarded if it fails to achieve results.

However, this criterion risks absurdity: if millions mobilise sincerely for secession, it would be unreasonable to deny the existence of a movement solely because it fails to achieve its aims, as illustrated by the 2017 Catalan referendum.

A more useful distinction is between effective and ineffective secessionist movements. Effective movements apply pressure that compels a state response; ineffective movements engage in activity but fail to generate material consequences.

For the purposes of PBST as formulated here, only effective secessionist movements are considered.

⁶⁵ Further theory-building, not to mention tools for operationalisation, for bargaining levels as well as valuable resource reliance is required. Notably, the theory as it stands, cannot explain why a strong, low-bargaining state, such as China, should be considered rational. Yet, it is general knowledge that China should be considered a rational actor.

Next, we turn to how parent states and external actors are likely to respond, based on their extraction calculations.

4.3.3 Calculating Parent State's and External Actors' Reactions

According to PBST, the reaction of the parent state (25), whether resisting the secessionist attempt (26) or allowing it (27), is dependent on extraction calculations – derived from the Post-Bellicist state logic. The variables which the parent state calculates are, firstly, the extraction gain of the secessionist area (25a), meaning the relative net extraction the area provides. This is due to the state's fundamental function of extracting from its area to the benefit of its rulers. The second variable is the cost of state-making required (25b) to allow for the continued extraction. This encompasses both the ongoing costs and likely future costs. The final variable is the parent states spillover risk (25c). The variable measures the potential galvanisation of other secessionist aspirations of movements, which might occur should one secessionist area be let go.

As stated, the weighing of the values of the variables leads to either the state resisting the attempt (26) or allowing the secession (27). What essentially determines the outcome is whether or not the expected future net-extraction (extraction [25a] – state-making costs required to realise the extraction [25b]) from the secessionist area is positive or negative. Should the expected net extraction be negative, the spillover risk (25c) steps in. Even if holding on to the secessionist area is unprofitable in terms of extraction, resisting its independence may still be logical if secession risks triggering other movements in more profitable regions. In such cases, what appears to be a cost sinkhole may be defended to prevent broader unravelling.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Under what conditions might a region, without secessionist aspirations, be more costly to retain than to let go? PBST suggests this is most likely under high-bargaining conditions. In such states, the government has engaged in extensive bargaining with its population and is therefore expected to provide a consistent level of public services to all citizens. Because high-bargaining states often have large and costly bureaucratic apparatuses responsible for delivering services, which are costly as well, integrating new or maintaining less productive existing regions may result in a net cost. In such cases, the rational course of action may be to grant independence – not as a failure, but as a cost-saving measure consistent with extractive logic. Conditions like these are, of course, uncommon and typically require that the state faces no immediate shortage of manpower or other vital resources required for war-making, which would make retaining the population worthwhile. In such situations, it is unlikely that a population would irrationally construct a secessionist identity that would, if realised, leave them worse off.

Moving on to the reactions of external actors to secession (28). As stated, “external actors” refers to neighbouring states, transnational groups, international organisations, and other entities with a significant stake in the secessionist outcome – a stake that ultimately stems from their extractive interests. These actors also possess the power to influence the success or failure of the secession, along with a strategic interest in doing so.

External actors’ reactions to secession (28) are determined similarly by the calculation of three variables. The first of these variables is the weakened war-making capability of a rival (28a). Suppose that the secession is taking place in a state hostile to the external actor, in which case a weakening of the rival state directly lessens the war-making costs of the external actor – thus reducing the need for bargaining as well. The variable is not applicable if the parent state is non-rival to the external actor.⁶⁷

The second variable is external actor’s spillover risk (28b). Due to the nature of external actors, it is not unlikely that they are geographical neighbours of the parent state.

Consequently, they may share minority cultures, which would be directly involved in the outcome of the parent state’s secessionist movement by potentially viewing themselves as part of the same “people” as the secessionists in the parent state. Even if this is not the case, changes in state borders in neighbouring states likely have galvanising effects on all secessionist movements in the vicinity, potentially emboldening unconnected secessionist movements within the external actor's borders.

This ties into the previously theorised concept of “baseline resistance”. Because nations are constructed and artificial by nature, states are, by default, against change to the state system, which works in their favour status quo. Even if there would be no spillover risk from secession to a third state, nor any other effects extraction-wise, such a state is theorised to be baseline

While net-negative secessionist areas are rare, net-zero regions – whose extractive contribution is roughly equal to their cost – are far more plausible. In these cases, local elites may see an opportunity to elevate their own position by becoming the ruling class of a new state. Their goal is not just autonomy, but to place themselves at the top of the new extractive hierarchy. Mobilising the population behind a secessionist identity becomes the vehicle for this ambition. From the parent state’s perspective, if the region offers no net gain, it may be more rational to let it go rather than engage in costly state-making efforts to retain it.

⁶⁷ A rival is not comprehensively defined in PBST, allowing for a multitude of definitions. Generally, a rival actor would be something that is comparable in strength and competing for the same resources as the other actor. Determining rivals when applying PBST calls for thorough knowledge of the case at hand.

resistant to secession, as the very event undermines the picture of eternity which states aim to construct for themselves and the state system. This ties into how it is only secessions which have gained acceptance by the parent state (35) typically gain widespread recognition, as the parent state's recognition of the new state "carries over" the parent state's legitimacy and doesn't violate it.

The last variable included in external actors' calculations (28) is the negative extraction impact (28c). The event of secession might cut off the parent state's access to a lucrative trade arrangement, trade route, or natural resource, for example, leading to the parent state taking a stance against the secession. Alternatively, the newly independent state could have promised better deals to the external actor, removing the effect of this variable (rendering the value to be None, as discussed later).

Out of the three variables, the weakened war-making capability of a rival (28a) and spillover risk (28b) are weighted the heaviest. The spillover risk (28b) likely has the heaviest implications, as the international state system is quite stable contemporarily, and the existing states have found equilibria war-making-wise with their rivals. Negative extraction impact (28c) typically carries the smallest weight, unless the external actor is geographically distant.

The outcome of the calculation leads to the external actor either supporting the secessionist attempt (29), remaining neutral (30), or even opposing the secessionist attempt (31). Support (29) is mostly symbolic in contemporary times, but it could be as concrete as military support. Neutrality (30) means simply not acting upon the secession at all, and not recognising the newly independent state either – at least during the event of secession or closely after it. Opposition towards the secession (31) could mean either symbolic denouncement of the independence or going as far as engaging in military action to bring the secessionist area back under the parent state's – or someone else's – rule.

A final note on external actors: while PBST primarily focuses on state-level logic, similar considerations can apply to international organisations, insofar as they reflect and channel member states' interests and derive legitimacy from them. If these organisations were to develop autonomous extractive logics distinct from their member states, this could independently shape their stance on secessionist movements. However, this possibility is not

pursued further here, as no contemporary international organisation currently possesses the capacity to enforce decisions without the military backing of states.

Lastly, the theory's expectations regarding the outcomes of secession are examined.

4.3.4 The Outcome of the Secession

After the beginning of the secessionist attempt, the secession event plays out. The way this happens depends heavily on the type of secessionist movement, as well as the situation in which the attempt was initiated. Should the parent state resist the attempt (26), the outcome might be the secessionist attempt simply withering away, such as in the case of Catalonia in 2017. This likely happens if the secessionist movement is counting on the parent state to simply respect the secessionists' wishes, even though the state has not allowed for the attempt to happen.

Typically, a bloodier event of civil war (32) might unfold, should the attempt itself be violent, or the secessionists be ready to take effective control of their area by force. The outcome of civil war can either lead to the secessionist attempt failing (33) after the civil war (32), or the secession gaining de facto independence (34) as a consequence of the civil war. It is also possible that the outcome of de facto independence (34) is achieved simply with armed uprising, without the tensions escalating into a civil war (34).

Compared to the outcome of a state allowing the secession (27) and the secessionist area gaining likely both the de jure and the de facto independence (35), the main difference between these two types of successful secessions ([34] versus [35]) is the parent state's approval of the outcome. As discussed before, if the parent state grants independence, the baseline resistance of other actors is removed, as the newly independent state has the blessing of the (most likely) already internationally recognised parent state. It could, and often has been, possible that the parent state has no material means to resist the secessionist attempt, leading to the secessionist area claiming de facto independence. Yet if it does not approve of the new state, no recognition will be granted to the new state.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Not even in the case of the new state being de facto far more effective than the parent state, such as in the case of Somaliland and Somalia, for example.

Lastly, after a successful secession, it is possible for the Bellicist war-making-state-making logic to restart (36). If the secessionist entity achieves de facto independence (34) and has managed to match its former parent state's military capacity to some extent, the logic of self-enforcing exchange may return. Especially if the former parent state remains hostile, the newly independent population is likely to be highly willing to supply their new state in order to defend themselves.⁶⁹ In such cases, state-building resumes under familiar conditions: an external threat, a mobilised population, and a mutual interest in survival.⁷⁰

In contrast, in cases where the secessionist population already enjoys significant autonomy and possesses well-developed governance institutions, these institutions are likely to be inherited by the new state (37). If the parent state poses no military threat, the newly independent entity may retain its existing structures without triggering the war-making-state-making logic. In such cases, the new state remains institutionally as strong as it was before independence – neither weakened by war nor reinforced by it.

With the conclusion of laying out the PBST, in the next chapter, the methodology for plausibility probing the novel theory is explored.

⁶⁹ For example, similar dynamics emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with various successor states strengthening their governmental structures following independence – such as Estonia and Georgia.

⁷⁰ Consider how, even when insurgent groups use violence, civilians may still support or tolerate them if they offer protection or basic security – particularly in contexts where the state is absent, predatory, or repressive. Goodwin (2001) emphasises that such support often arises not from ideological commitment, but from exclusion, desperation, or the perception that “no other way out” exists (ibid., 2001). In a world dominated by states, having one that is committed to protecting you becomes extraordinarily important.

5 Methodology for Plausibility Probing PBST

In this chapter, the theory of PBST is plausibly probed through two empirical research questions. The theory is applied to eight case studies in total, six of which focus on the same independence movements examined across both research questions.

As noted, this study employs a comparative case study design. For E1, which examines the conditions under which secessionist movements emerge, a structured, focused comparison method (George & Bennett 2005) is used. This allows for systematic comparison across cases based on consistent guiding questions.

For E2, a Strategic Choice Approach (as developed by David A. Lake and Robert Powell [1999]) is adopted, applying a cost-benefit logic to assess how parent states and external actors respond to secessionist referenda. This enables the reconstruction of the strategic context in which these decisions were made, viewed through the PBST lens.

The constructed theory will be applied to a range of empirical cases in order to evaluate its explanatory potential. Proper theory testing is beyond the scope of this thesis, and thus, the empirical analysis is limited to plausibility probing.

The case selection differs slightly between the two empirical research questions. For E1, the focus is on identity groups and whether they develop secessionist movements. For this reason, some groups included in E1 are excluded from E2 – if no movement emerges, there will be no secessionist attempt to assess actor responses to.

The case selection criteria for the *E1 – Can material non-benefit and repression, as theorised in PBST, account for the emergence of secessionist movements?* are as follows:

- 1) Post-Cold War context: Ensures comparability within the current international system. All cases either developed or escalated after 1989 or remained in a similar condition before and after the Cold War.
- 2) Demographic and political significance: Each case involves a sizable or politically meaningful population, excluding marginal or symbolic claims (e.g. those from minor island communities).

- 3) Clear identity-based political distinction: The group is represented as culturally, linguistically, or historically distinct within the parent state.
- 4) “Pure” secessionism: The movement seeks to create an independent state, as opposed to joining another country (i.e. irredentism).
- 5) Variation in outcome: Cases include both the presence and absence of secessionist movements, enabling causal comparison.
- 6) Data accessibility: All cases are supported by sufficient academic literature, media reporting, and official documentation.

Thus, cases selected for E1 are:

- 1) Catalonia (2017)
- 2) Iraqi Kurdistan (2017)
- 3) Scotland (2014)
- 4) South Sudan

As comparison cases:

- 5) Swedish-speaking minority in Finland

The comparison case shares many characteristics found in the secessionist cases – such as linguistic distinctiveness and a history of political autonomy – but has not developed a modern secessionist movement. Its inclusion allows for a test of the explanatory scope of the theory by examining why seemingly similar identity groups do not mobilise for independence. The case understandably does not follow the same case selection criteria as the “proper” cases, and its conditions and validity for inclusion are discussed more thoroughly in its respective analysis section.

The case selection criteria for *E2 – Can extraction interests plausibly account for the stance parent states and external actors take toward independence attempts?* – are as follows:

- 1) Presence of a referendum or equivalent declaration: Each case features either a formal independence referendum or a decisive declaration of independence, allowing for the analysis of concrete actor responses.

- 2) Observable reactions by parent states and/or external actors: The case must offer sufficient data on how key actors responded – including support, opposition, or neutrality – whether expressed through diplomatic recognition, military or financial intervention, or public statements.
- 3) Variation in actor behaviour: Cases are selected to reflect variation in responses by both parent states and external actors, enabling comparison.
- 4) Data availability: Each case must be supported by accessible academic literature, media coverage, statistical data, or official documentation regarding economic ties, extraction dynamics, and foreign policy behaviour.

Based on these criteria, the selected cases for E2 are:

- 1) Catalonia (2017)
- 2) Scotland (2014)⁷¹
- 3) South Sudan (2011)

These cases offer sufficient variation in both actor responses and economic extraction dynamics to allow for comparative analysis of how material interests shape political reactions to independence referenda. Iraqi Kurdistan is omitted due to the relations of relevant external actors posing an excessive workload in order to carry out the analysis, which is not the focus of this thesis.

It should be noted that the purpose of this thesis is not to provide an in-depth historical account of each selected case. Rather, each case study offers a general overview focused on identifying the key variables relevant to the theory and research questions. Additionally, the role of Cold War dynamics in shaping secessionist outcomes remains uncertain. As such, caution is advised when attempting to apply the theory to cases situated within the Cold War era, as the mechanisms identified in this thesis may not operate under Cold War conditions in the same way.

⁷¹ Scotland is treated as a “non-attempt”, where the referendum did not manage to mobilise the majority of people in favour of it. Despite this, it is the parent state’s, United Kingdom’s, reaction to the independence referendum, which makes the case interesting and worth exploring.

5.1 Operationalisation of the First Research Question – Conditions for the Birth of Secession

This sub-section operationalises PBST to answer the first empirical research question:

E1: Can material non-benefit and repression, as theorised in PBST, account for the emergence of secessionist movements?

The empirical research design will allow for systematic comparison of cases using structured focused comparison (George & Bennett 2005), a method well-suited for theory-testing and theory-building in small-N research, as well as plausibility probing.

Structured focused comparison is a well-suited method for testing PBST across multiple case studies. As George and Bennett (2005) explain, the method is *structured* in the sense that researchers pose a set of standardised, theory-driven questions across all cases, ensuring comparability and internal coherence. It is *focused* because it limits the analysis to those specific elements of each case that are relevant to the theoretical framework (George & Bennett 2005, 102). Each case study will be queried with the same theoretical questions (derived from PBST) in order to compare results systematically.

Prior to the targeted comparison, the approach includes an exploratory phase that George and Bennett call “soaking and poking” – a process of familiarising oneself with the broad historical context of each case without yet applying the theory (ibid., 129). This phase provides a broad yet structured historical overview, ensuring that the subsequent theory-driven analysis is contextualised appropriately.⁷²

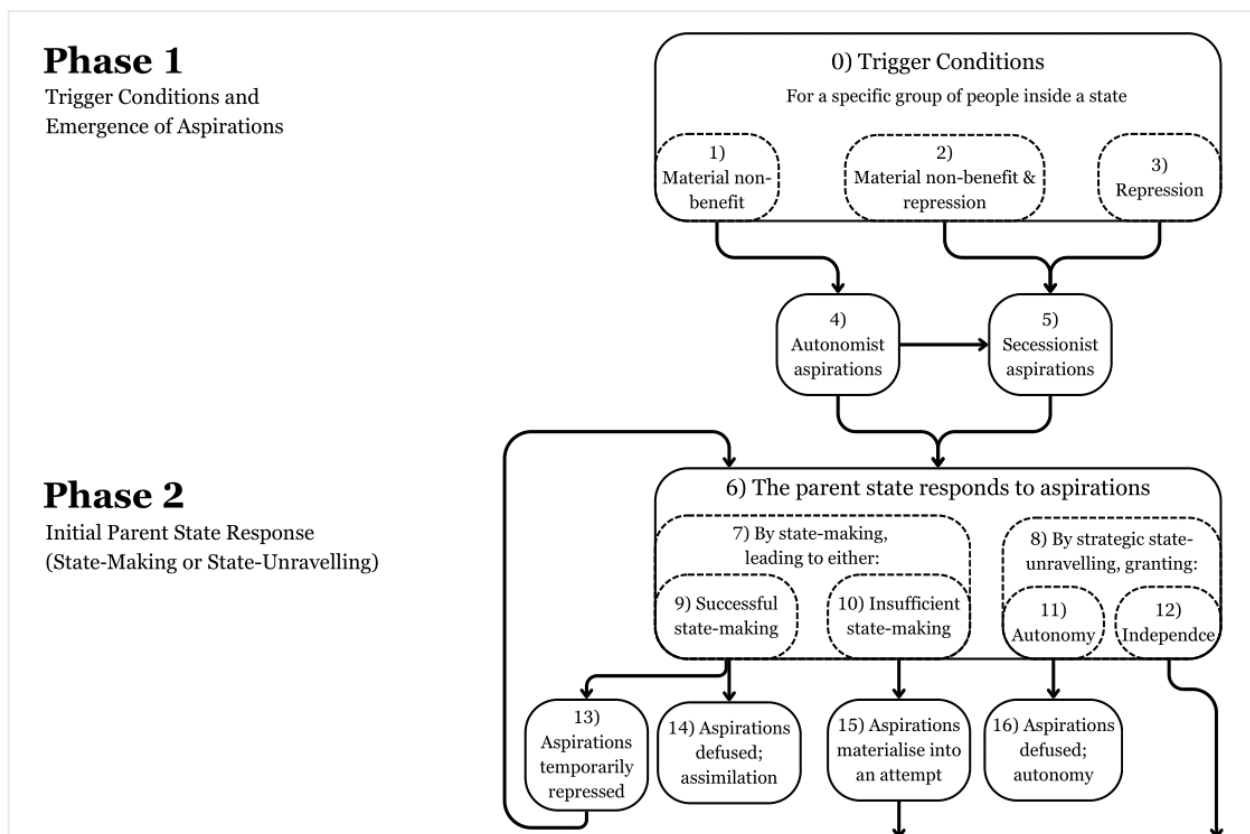
Given the broad historical and contemporary scope required, this study does not attempt exhaustive process tracing or extensive cross-source verification. Rather, the analysis explicitly positions itself as “plausibility probing” (George & Bennett 2005, 109–110). It seeks preliminary confirmation of whether the variables outlined by PBST plausibly account for the observed outcomes, while leaving deeper causal investigation for future studies. This clearly defined analytical scope mitigates repetition and maintains methodological clarity.

⁷² While traditional top-down historical narratives – often centred on “gods and kings” – can be critiqued for overlooking the lived experiences of ordinary people, such an approach is analytically appropriate here. Since this study focuses on state structures and administrative dynamics, the classical mode of history serves its purpose well, though it is complemented by special attention to the secessionist population.

This study follows the three core criteria of SFC design. First, it defines a class of events – namely, secessionist attempts in the post–Cold War period. Second, it identifies a research objective: testing whether the key variables derived from PBST explain the emergence of the most prominent and representative secessionist movements. Third, it applies a common set of theory-informed variables – specifically, whether the parent state is materially beneficial to the group in question, and whether it represses the group, operationalised as described below (George & Bennett 2005, 102).

The first research question focuses solely on the birth of the secessionist movements, which are encompassed in “Phase 1” of the PBST flowchart, shown in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9. Phases 1 and 2 of Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST): Trigger Conditions and Parent State Responses to Aspirations. Source: Author’s elaboration.



The operationalisation focuses on determining the presence of variables of “trigger conditions” (0) derived from PBST:

- Material non-benefit (1): Evaluated through a straightforward comparative analysis of GDP per capita – or an economic comparison of more nuance where available – between the secessionist region and the rest of the parent state. A significantly higher

GDP per capita in the secessionist area indicates that the parent state is not materially beneficial to the group.

- Repression (3): Assessed through authoritative secondary literature documenting state conduct toward the secessionist population.
- Material non-benefit & repression (2): The presence of both former variables ([1] & [3]) concludes that the presence of the aggregate variable (2).

Since the selected case studies concern past events, their outcomes are already known, and Phase 2 of PBST is not the focus of plausibility probing in E1. It is therefore taken as given that the presence of the initial trigger conditions (0) led to secessionist aspirations eventually materialising into an actual attempt (15). This holds regardless of whether the aspirations were initially autonomist (4) before turning secessionist (5), or how the parent state responded (6) – including how many iterations of state-making (7) led to temporarily successful repression (13), before ultimately new attempts at state-making proved insufficient (10), allowing the aspirations to materialise into an attempt (15). In other words, the events occurring between the formation of secessionist aspirations and their eventual materialisation into an actual attempt are not the focus here.⁷³

A final note on the scope of this empirical section. To elevate the analysis to the level of full theory testing instead of plausibility probing, more rigorous engagement with both economic indicators and competing historical accounts would be required. While GDP offers a broad indication of a region's economic standing, it does not capture fiscal transfers, budget allocations, or disparities in public investment. Similarly, while this study provides a focused overview of the historical and political conditions facing secessionist populations, a deeper cross-comparison of secondary sources – and their potential contradictions – would be necessary for a more comprehensive evaluation.⁷⁴

The next subchapter will turn to the operationalisation of the second empirical research question, which deals with how actors respond to independence referenda.

⁷³ The previous pattern is given in all cases, except the control case of Finnish Swedes, where no aspirations formed.

⁷⁴ Phase 2 of the PBST could be examined as well with the use of case studies, but this would call for even greater micro-level scrutiny of the unfolded events.

5.2 Operationalisation of the Second Research Question – Reactions to Secession Attempts

This section operationalises the second empirical research question:

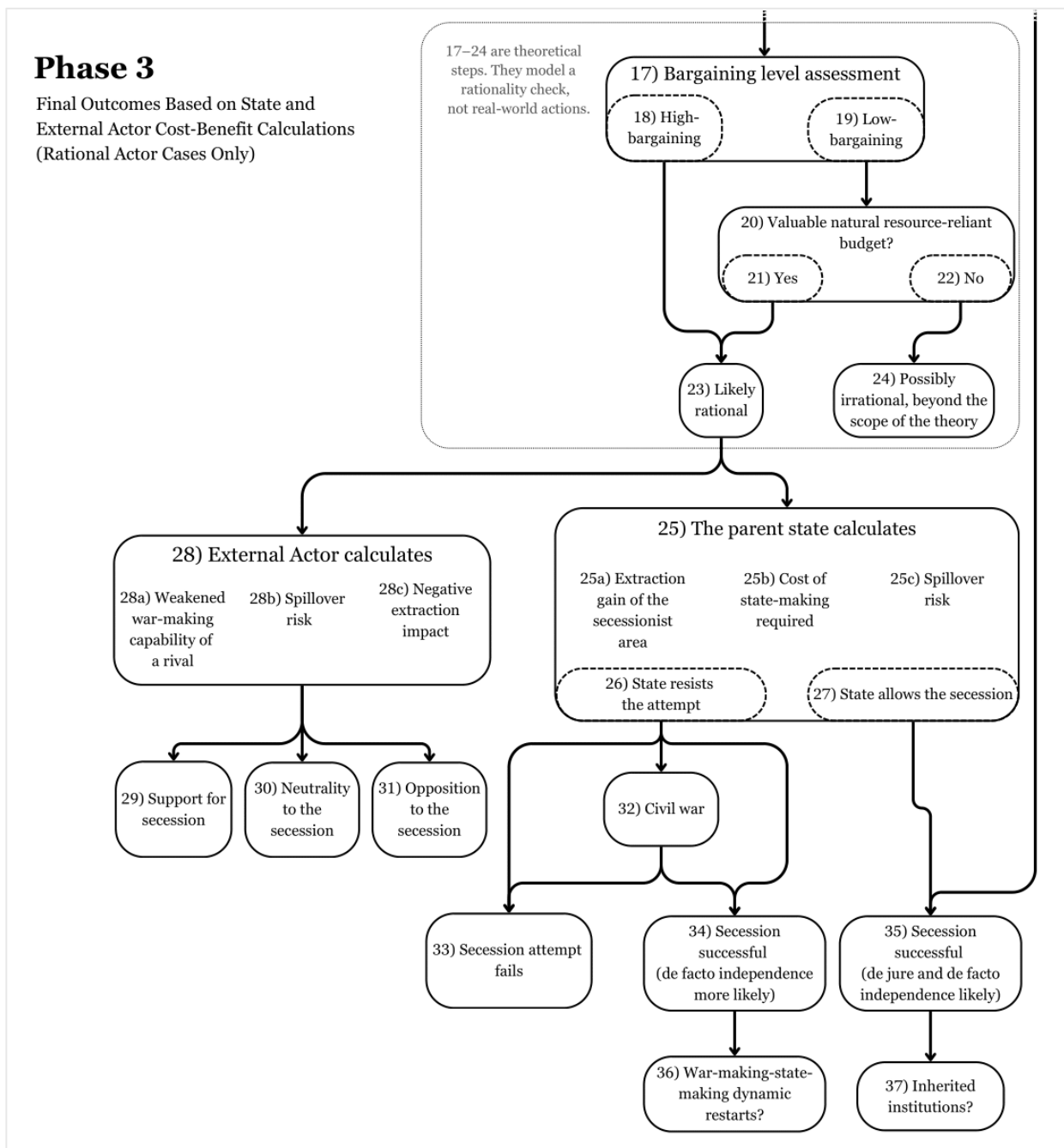
E2: Can extraction interests plausibly account for the stance parent states and external actors take toward independence attempts?

In doing this, the study adopts a modified Strategic Choice Approach (SCA) (Lake & Powell 1999), applied through a cost-benefit framework grounded in the materialist logic of PBST. This approach enables a structured evaluation of how both parent states and external actors responded to secessionist attempts, based on their extractive interests and survival calculations.

Strategic Choice Analysis views actors as decision-makers operating under constraints, assessing the benefits and risks of various options. In its original form, SCA assumes rational utility-maximising behaviour. However, Post-Bellicism modifies this assumption by embedding state rationality within historical and material constraints: state actions are shaped by their foundational functions – extraction, war-making, state-making, and protection – rather than by abstract utility alone, although the concepts are overlapping.

The variables used in the cost-benefit framework are derived from *Phase 3* of the PBST flowchart, shown in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10. Components of PBST, which will be explored in research question E2. Source: Author's elaboration.



Starting from the rationality check (17–24), the bargaining level assessment is first in order (17). While the categorisations of high-bargaining (18) and low-bargaining (19) states are central to PBST, they remain difficult to determine exhaustively, and a full-scale operationalisation of bargaining level is beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus the levels are estimated from the familiarity of the actors in cases gained from “soaking and poking”.

Specifically, when assessing whether a low-bargaining actor’s (19) budget relies on valuable natural resources (20), with the outcome being either affirmative (21) or negative (22), the

evaluation does not depend on sparse or inconsistent resource export data. Instead, each case is assessed through historical analysis and case-specific investigation (“soaking and poking”) to determine the value of the variable.

After assessing the rationality of the actor within the case study (17–24), the calculations of both the parent state (25) and external actor or several external actors (28) are carried out.

The variables to be considered for these actors are restated here:

For Parent States (25):

- *Extraction Gain of the Secessionist Area (25a) – Is the region net positive in terms of extraction?*
- *Cost of State-Making Required (25b) – Would retaining the region involve additional state-making costs? Do the assumed costs outweigh the extraction value?*
- *Spillover Risk (25c) – Would allowing the region to secede likely cause a spillover effect within the state?*

For External Actors (28):

- *Hostile war-making reduction (28a) – Would the secession weaken external actors' rivals' war-making capability?*
- *Domestic Spillover Risk (28b) – Is there a risk of a domino effect within the external actors' territory from the secession?*
- *Negative Impact on External Actors' Extraction (28c) – Would the secession hinder or boost external actors' access to extraction?*

Each variable is evaluated using available economic data, secondary literature, and press statements. Responses are then assessed for consistency with the logic of extractive rationality as laid out in PBST. To keep the scope of the analysis manageable, the variables will be inserted as ordinal values, stemming from highest to lowest: *High, Moderate, Low, Baseline, None*.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Notably, for the variable concerning the negative extraction impact of external actors (28c), the most “positive” outcome is “None”, as this variable measures the damage that secession would inflict on the external actor's

The analysis utilises the structured-focused comparison carried out in Section 5.1, supplemented with additional data and analysis where necessary to determine the variables. The utilisation of the analysis framework with the same variables enables consistent cross-case analysis and facilitates the identification of patterns in state and external actor behaviour. Case selection and criteria were previously outlined at the beginning of this chapter and are not repeated here.

It should be noted that rather than attempting to reconstruct the subjective reasoning of individual leaders, this model evaluates whether actions align with what a rational state, seeking to maximise extraction and preserve control, would be expected to do under Post-Bellicist logic.

extraction. Thus, for example, if the secessionists credibly promised the external actor access to more extraction than was previously available prior to the potential secession, this would yield positive outcomes for the external actor. Therefore, when evaluating such a scenario, the negative extraction impact would amount to “None”, as the overall extraction impact would be positive.

6 Analysis – Applying Post-Bellicist Secession Theory

In this chapter, the analysis will be carried out as described in the previous methodology chapter. The criteria for the selection of cases and the operationalisation of the theory are specified in the previous section.

The structure of the analysis chapter is as follows. In subchapter 6.1, the first research question is addressed through five case studies: Catalonia, Iraqi Kurdistan, Scotland, South Sudan, and the comparative case of Finnish Swedes. These cases are evaluated in accordance with the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 5, focusing on Phases 1 and 2 of PBST. The subchapter concludes with a concise summary of the central findings. Subchapter 6.2 then turns to the second research question, corresponding to Phase 3 of PBST. The cases of Catalonia, Scotland, and South Sudan are analysed, accompanied by a summary table of the main findings. These findings – alongside the theoretical framework and any contradictions to its expected logic – are examined further in the summary sections 6.1.10 and 6.2.4.

6.1 Analysis for the First Empirical Question

In this sub-section, the first research question is answered:

E1: Can material non-benefit and repression, as theorised in PBST, account for the emergence of secessionist movements?

Starting with the case of Catalonia.

6.1.1 Catalonia – Background of the Catalan Secessionist Attempt

This section applies the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) to the Catalonia case in order to assess whether the key explanatory variables – material disadvantage and repression – were present prior to the 2017 secessionist attempt. This is preceded by a brief overview of the historical development of Catalan nationalism.

Catalonia – visible in Figure 11 below – is home to approximately 7.5 million people as of the years preceding the 2017 referendum, representing around 16% of Spain's total population

(IDESCAT 2017). The region is culturally and linguistically distinct to some extent, with a 30.0 percent of its population viewing Catalan as their language of identification, and 14.6 percent viewing both Catalan and Spanish as the language of their identification. Notably, 40 percent of Catalonian population viewed Spanish to be their language of identification.⁷⁶ Catalan is the primary language in education and public administration Catalonia. Nevertheless, the cultural distinction has long constituted a significant part of Catalonia’s nationalist claims.

Figure 11. Catalonia (dark green) and Spain (light green). Source: Adapted from Wikimedia Commons (2023).



As Keating (1996) identifies, Catalonia traces its “national” history to the Middle Ages, emerging as a distinct territorial area with its own jurisdiction, culture, and language. The Catalan language, while Latin-based, developed separately from its neighbours, including Occitan and Castilian. The Count of Barcelona severed ties with the French crown in 988, and Catalonia’s first representative institutions were established in the thirteenth century. Beginning in 1137, Catalonia became part of the Crown of Aragon, a powerful Mediterranean trading confederation. This arrangement evolved into a dynastic union with Castile in 1469, ultimately culminating in the formation of the Spanish monarchy in 1516. Importantly, Catalonia retained its own institutions and privileges, including autonomous taxation and

⁷⁶ All of the language-related figures are from 2023 (IDESCAT 2023).

exemption from military conscription unless directly attacked. The only significant exclusion was from colonial administration in the Americas. (Keating 1996, 115–116.)

Despite successive centralising efforts, Spain was unable to establish the kind of absolutism seen in France. Catalonia preserved relative autonomy well into the modern period. In the early twentieth century, Catalanism was characterised by a dual ambition: it sought both self-government and a broader modernising influence on Spain, which remained less developed (Keating 1996, 116–118).

During the Spanish Civil War, Catalonia functioned as a practically independent state. Following Franco's victory, however, the region's autonomy was dismantled and Castilian was imposed as the sole administrative language. In the 1960s, an influx of migrants from other parts of Spain to economically dynamic Catalonia paradoxically strengthened Catalan identity, as a generation grew up speaking Catalan at home while being barred from using it publicly. (Keating 1996, 118–121.)

With the restoration of democracy, Catalonia regained a measure of autonomy. Yet subsequent Spanish governments have continually sought to reintegrate the region more tightly into the unitary state. (Keating 1996, 121–122.)

Keating (1996) ends his overview in the mid-1990s, but since then, Catalonia has faced important developments, especially after the year 2000. A key moment was the revision of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy in 2006. It was initially approved by Catalan voters, but later challenged and partly overturned by the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2010. The Court's ruling cancelled major parts of the Statute, including Catalonia's right to control its own taxes, judicial powers, and even the symbolic recognition of Catalonia as a nation, which increased feelings of unfair treatment among Catalans. (Guibernau 2013, 381–382.)

After the decision, there was a large demonstration on 10 July 2010, when more than a million Catalans gathered in Barcelona, rallying around the slogan "We are a nation. We decide". (Guibernau 2013, 383.) This frustration was deepened further by the economic crisis starting from 2008, causing Catalonia to have an unemployment rate of around 23.9% by early 2013. At the same time, many Catalans felt the region suffered unfairly from fiscal policies, as Catalonia was paying more money to the Spanish government than it received back, with an annual deficit of around 8% of its GDP. (Ibid., 382.) Catalonia's economic grievances were

highlighted further by the fact that the region contributed about 19.4% to Spain's total revenues but received back just 14%, causing resentment towards what many perceived as exploitation by the central government. (Ibid., 382.)

This resentment grew into stronger support for independence: between June 2011 and November 2012, the support for independence jumped from 42.9% to around 57%. (Guibernau 2013, 386.) In January 2013, the Catalan parliament made a symbolic declaration, officially calling the Catalan people a "sovereign political and legal entity," setting the stage politically for the independence referendum. (Ibid., 390.)

Following the symbolic declaration of sovereignty, the Catalan independence movement continued to gain momentum. On 9 November 2014, the Catalan government held a non-binding independence vote, called a "consultation", despite strong opposition from the Spanish government and judiciary, which deemed it illegal. Approximately 2.3 million Catalans participated, and about 80 percent supported independence, although turnout was relatively modest at around 37 percent, as many opponents boycotted the vote. (Cetrà & Harvey 2019, 170.)

Tensions peaked on 1 October 2017, when Catalonia conducted a unilateral independence referendum, again declared illegal by the Spanish Constitutional Court. The Spanish government responded forcefully, deploying national police and civil guards to seize ballot boxes and prevent voting. Violent confrontations ensued, leaving hundreds of Catalans injured. Despite the disruptions, Catalan authorities reported a turnout of roughly 43 percent, with 90 percent voting in favour of independence. However, similar to the 2014 vote, many opposed to independence abstained from participating. (BBC News 2017.)

6.1.2 Catalonia – Structured Focused Evaluation

In this sub-chapter, the preceding summary of events is evaluated through the lens of PBST to determine the values of the two case-specific variables:

1. Was the Spanish state materially beneficial to Catalonia?
2. Was the Catalan people repressed by the Spanish state?

Firstly, while contested, it can be concluded that the Spanish state was not materially beneficial to Catalonia, as the area contributed approximately 19.4% of Spain's revenue but

received only 14% in return (Guibernau 2013, 382). The fiscal deficit remained notable in subsequent years, reaching over 5% of Catalonia's GDP in 2014 (Catalan News 2019). However, such claims of fiscal mistreatment have been disputed by other scholars, most notably Castells (2014), who presents alternative interpretations.⁷⁷ Further engagement with these competing measurements is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Nevertheless, using the most basic comparative measure – GDP per capita – Catalonia consistently appears wealthier than Spain overall in the years leading up to the referendum. The comparison begins from 2010, which can be seen as a pre-culmination point in the movement, marked by mass protests against the Spanish court's overruling of the revised Statute and the cancellation of Catalonia's right to manage its own taxation.⁷⁸

The GDP data from Countryeconomy is compiled in Table 7 below. It should be noted that the difference between Catalonia and Spain is in reality likely even larger, as the value of Spain includes that of Catalonia's, bringing it higher.

Table 7. GDP per capita comparison between Catalonia and Spain, 2010–2017. Source: Countryeconomy (n.d.b) and Countryeconomy (n.d.c). Note: figures are expressed in nominal terms (current prices, not adjusted for inflation).

Year	GDP per capita (US\$)		Difference (US\$) (Spain – Catalonia)
	Catalonia	Spain	
2017	33,661	28,395	- 5,266
2016	31,908	26,753	- 5,155
2015	30,917	25,992	- 4,925
2014	35,381	29,719	- 5,662
2013	34,621	29,236	- 5,385
2012	33,406	28,479	- 4,927
2011	37,035	31,823	- 5,212
2010	35,844	30,693	- 5,151

While a detailed assessment of tax distribution is not attempted here, the significant and consistent gap in GDP per capita supports the notion that Catalonia was economically better

⁷⁷ It is no surprise that the distribution of fiscal benefits between the parent state and the secessionist region is a highly politicised issue.

⁷⁸ As seen on in the last sub-chapter.

off than the rest of Spain. This lends credibility to the argument that remaining within the Spanish state was not materially beneficial for Catalonia.

Thus, the value for the first variable is determined as “yes” – Catalonia was not materially benefiting from the parent state.

As for the second variable – whether Catalans were repressed by the Spanish state – there are no indications of violent repression prior to the 2017 referendum in the sources consulted in subchapter 6.1.1.1. Historical repression during the Franco era is excluded from the analysis, as the conditions since then have improved, and were not seemingly a factor in contemporary secessionism. Additionally, the violent police response in 2017 is also excluded, as it followed the formal attempt and thus lies outside the scope of this specific variable.

Therefore, based on the available evidence, the value for the second variable is determined as “No” – there was no clear repression prior to the secession attempt.⁷⁹

6.1.3 Iraqi Kurdistan – Background of the Iraqi Kurdistan Secessionist Attempt

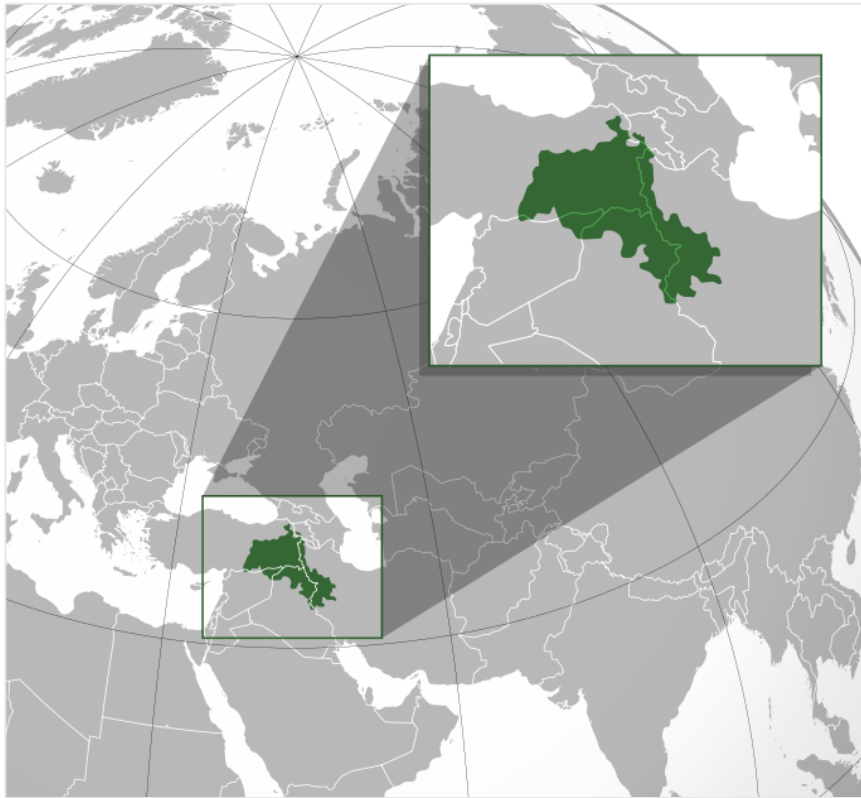
This section applies the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) to the case of Iraqi Kurdistan in the same manner as earlier, assessing whether the key explanatory variables – material disadvantage and repression – were present prior to the 2017 secessionist attempt. As with the previous case, the analysis begins with a “soaking and poking” phase outlining the broader context. In this case, however, the background is far more complex and devastating than in the case of Catalonia.

To give even a modestly adequate summary of the situation of the Kurdish people is far beyond the scope of this thesis. “Orphans of the universe”, infamously the largest people without a state, their situation still remains widely unknown. The area of Kurdistan – not to be confused with Iraqi Kurdistan, which is part of Kurdistan as whole – is commonly situated spanning the area in which majority of people are Kurds.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ The overview-like nature of the analysis presented should be emphasised. Should there have been forms of repression not captured in the sources consulted, this section does not intend to dismiss or minimise them in any way.

⁸⁰ McDowall uses the same definition of Kurdistan. And while he notes the definition of Kurdistan to be controversial, it should be clear by now that the approach adopted in this thesis disregards the sacredness of existing state borders, not viewing the concept of Kurdistan as controversial. Instead, the concept serves a useful purpose in grasping the concept of the Kurdish nationalistic aspirations. See McDowall (2004, XII).

Figure 12. Kurdish-inhabited areas in green based on CIA (1992) data. Source: Adapted from Wikimedia Commons (2023).



As is visible from Figure 12, the Kurdish people are commonly attributed to inhabit areas of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, as well as Armenia.

According to the estimate by Institut Kurde de Paris (n.d.), the population estimate for the Kurdish people varies from approximately 36 million to 45 million, in the distribution visible in Table 8 below.⁸¹

⁸¹ It should be noted that the approximations vary greatly, and as many of the countries in which Kurds reside do not recognize their identity, the potentially generous approximation by the Insitut Kurde de Paris is sufficient to give a general understanding.

Table 8. The Kurdish population estimate as of 2016. Source: Institut Kurde de Paris (n.d.).

Country / Area	Minimum estimate of Kurdish population (million)	Maximum estimate of Kurdish population (million)
Turkey	15	20
Iran	10	12
Iraq	8	8.5
Syria	3	3.6
Kurdish diaspora in Europe	1.2	1.5
Kurdish diaspora of the former USSR	0.4	0.4

Kurdish identity historically evolved under conditions of decentralised authority, geographical isolation, and external domination. According to McDowall (2004, 8–17), until the late nineteenth century, Kurdish society was largely organised around tribal affiliations and local leaders, without unified central structures. Kurdish areas were loosely integrated into the Ottoman imperial system, maintaining considerable autonomy until reforms aimed at centralising Ottoman control disrupted these traditional arrangements and stimulated new forms of political mobilisation. (Ibid., 25–36.)

A significant early moment in Kurdish identity formation came with Shaykh Ubaydullah’s revolt in 1880, during which the concept of a “Kurdish nation” first emerged explicitly in political terms (McDowall 2004, 53–59). Despite this milestone, Kurdish nationalism remained limited by linguistic, tribal, and regional fragmentation. McDowall (2004, 115–226) indicates that it was primarily the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, after the turmoil which followed World War I, that divided Kurdish populations across Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. This division eventually prompted a more unified Kurdish nationalism as a reaction against imposed state boundaries and repressive national policies.

Each of these states sought to suppress Kurdish identity through various means. In Turkey, the state commonly denied the existence of Kurds as a separate people, enforcing linguistic and cultural assimilation. Kurdish rebellions, notably the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925, were harshly suppressed. (McDowall 2004, 184–211.) From the 1980s onwards, this repression fuelled the rise of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), designated as a terrorist organisation by

Turkey, the EU, and the US, whose insurgency remains ongoing (Ibid., 420–450). Similarly, Iran repressed Kurdish political expression, notably dismantling the short-lived Republic of Mahabad established in 1946 and continuously restricting Kurdish autonomy (McDowall 2004, 240–246). In Iraq, the Kurdish population experienced systematic repression and violent military campaigns, including the notorious Anfal campaign in the late 1980s during the regime of Saddam Hussein, involving chemical attacks against civilians (McDowall 2004, 343–361).

The Kurdish question is further complicated by the fragmented geography of Kurdish settlement. In Syria, according to Akturk (2016), the Baath regime actively suppressed Kurdish identity, intensified after the onset of the Syrian Civil War. The conflict facilitated the rise of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), linked to the PKK, which established local autonomy and gained international attention through its resistance against ISIS. However, Turkey's government views the PYD as an extension of the PKK, complicating the Kurdish question regionally. (Ibid., 154–155.)

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) – shown in Figure 13 below – with the backing of the United States after the Gulf War marked the first substantial instance of Kurdish self-governance in modern times (McDowall 2004, 379–382, 387–391). The KRG's political position strengthened further during the rise of ISIS in 2014, when Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Northern Iraq, as well as PYD forces in Northern Syria, successfully resisted ISIS's advance despite the weakness of Iraqi central forces. (Akturk 2016, 156). This success likely emboldened Kurdish political aspirations and contributed to the decision to hold an independence referendum in 2017.

Figure 13. Administrative map of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Adapted from: Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (n.d.).



In the next sub-section, values for the predefined variables are determined from the previous overview of the situation leading up to the secession attempt.

6.1.4 Iraqi Kurdistan – Structured Focused Evaluation

The questions for determining the variables are:

1. Was the state of Iraq materially beneficial to the Kurdistan Region?
2. Were the Kurdish people repressed by the Iraqi state?

It is obvious from the brief account presented in the last sub-section that the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan differs tremendously from that of Catalonia. Most glaringly, it is a de facto independent state, whereas Catalonia only had various degrees of autonomy.⁸² Iraqi Kurdistan

⁸² Griffiths (2021) categorises Iraqi Kurdistan as a “de facto state”, which he considers one of the types of secessionist movements (ibid., 12).

The Kurdistan Region began functioning as a de facto autonomous entity after the Gulf War in 1991, when a no-fly zone was established by Western powers. This autonomy was later formalised in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution,

has its own effective military forces, Peshmerga, and thus enjoys an effective monopoly of violence within its borders. The independence movements have been aimed at gaining recognition from the central government, as well as international actors, ever since the de facto statehood was achieved in 2005.

While there is no shortage of accounts regarding the repression faced by the Kurdish people – both in Iraqi Kurdistan before autonomy and in all the surrounding states with Kurdish populations – the financial data required to answer the first of the two questions is incomplete.

While there are GDP estimates for Iraq at large, the available data for the Kurdistan region is only for the year 2018, as visible in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Kurdistan Region vs Iraq GDP per capita comparison in 2018. Source: Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (2022).⁸³

Year	GDP per capita (US\$)		Difference (US\$)
	Kurdistan Region	Iraq	(Iraq – Kurdistan region)
2018	4,400	5,700	1300

Due to a lack of consistent GDP per capita data before 2018, it is difficult to directly compare the economic conditions of Iraqi Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. Nevertheless, the political economy surrounding oil revenues sheds light on whether the Iraqi state was materially beneficial to the Kurdistan Region in the years leading up to the 2017 referendum.

The Kurdistan Regional Government struck deals on oil transfers, both internal and external, but they were constantly renegotiated due to disagreements, setbacks, and the Iraqi central government's failure to hold up its end with payments (S&P Global 2024). These budget shortfalls left the KRG unable to plan its public spending reliably and forced it to begin exporting oil independently through its own pipeline infrastructure, most importantly via Turkey (Atlantic Council 2024; EIA 2021).

which recognised the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and granted it broad powers, including control over internal security and education. (Stansfield 2003; Natali 2010.)

⁸³ Data for the Kurdistan Region is from the Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (KRSO 2022). It was not specified whether the figure is nominal or adjusted for inflation. The value was converted from Iraqi Dinar using the exchange rate of 1 IQD = 0.00082 USD (Google Finance, n.d.). Iraq's GDP per capita is from Countryeconomy (n.d.a) and reported in nominal terms (not adjusted for inflation).

While the Region has functioned with considerable autonomy since the 1990s, further increasing in 2005, the constant legal and financial pressure from Baghdad reveals an underlying structural imbalance. (Atlantic Council, 2024; S&P Global, 2024). In 2023, although after the period under examination, a legal ruling led to the suspension of KRG oil exports via Turkey – demonstrating how vulnerable the Region remains to federal leverage (Rudaw 2024). This vulnerability has historical roots in the long-standing inability to agree on a stable and fair revenue-sharing mechanism.

This supports the conclusion that, in material terms, the Iraqi state was “*not beneficial*” to the Kurdish region before its independence attempt in 2017. Their relationship seemed to resemble that of two independent states negotiating oil trades, albeit with significant power imbalances.

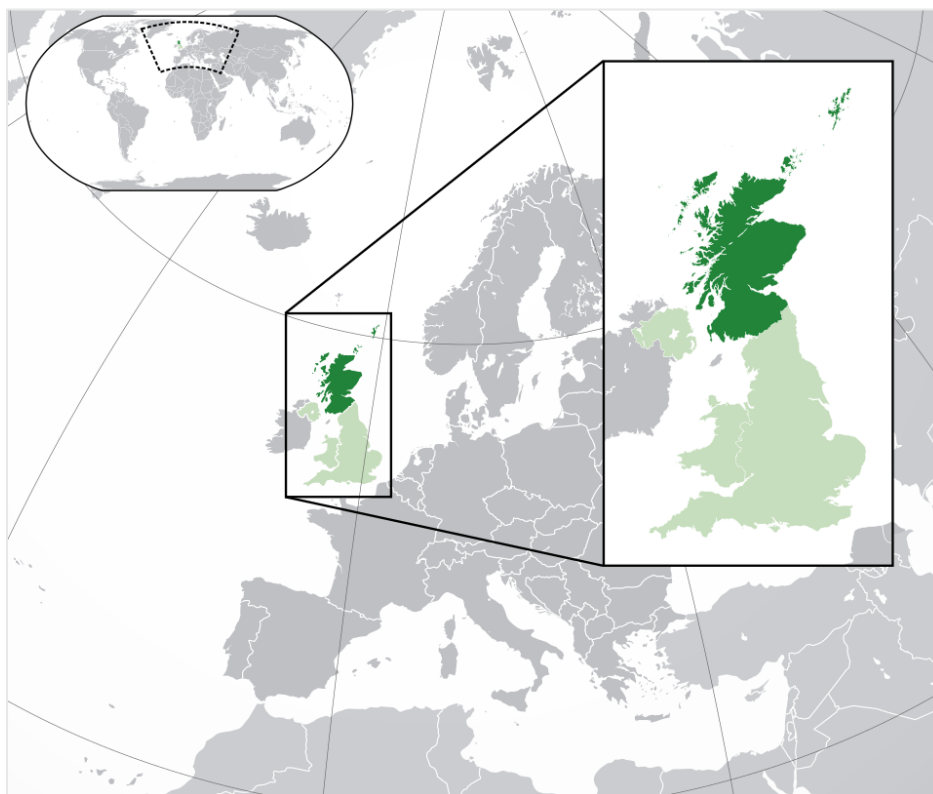
Regarding the second question of whether the Kurdish people were repressed by the Iraqi state, the answer is a resounding “yes”. Naturally, this repression has ceased in its previous form since the Kurdistan Region established its own military forces.

6.1.5 Scotland – Background of the Scottish Secessionist Non-Attempt

This section applies the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) to the Scottish case to assess the state of the explanatory variables – material disadvantage and repression – prior to the 2014 independence referendum, which is here characterised as a secessionist non-attempt. Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom are visible in Figure 14.

Before turning to the general background, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by a secessionist “non-attempt” in this case. In contrast to the other cases analysed, where the independence movements achieved a mandate for secession, majority support for independence in Scotland ultimately did not materialise. In the 2014 referendum, the total electorate was 4,283,392, with a turnout of 84.59%. Of the votes cast, 55.3% voted “No” and 44.7% voted “Yes.” A clear majority of the eligible population opposed secession. (BBC News 2014.)

Figure 14. Scotland (dark green) and the United Kingdom (light green). Source: Wikimedia Commons (2025).



This situation stands in contrast to the other case studies, where the independence movements succeeded in mobilising support but were blocked by external obstacles. In Scotland’s case, by contrast, the central government of the United Kingdom permitted the secession process to proceed, yet the movement failed to secure the necessary level of public support.

As previously noted, “for PBST and the scope of this thesis, a secessionist attempt is defined as the culmination of an effective secessionist movement into a declaration or referendum that can be interpreted as representing the will of the majority (over 50 percent of the eligible voting population of those who would become citizens of the new state” (Chapter 4.3.2).

By this definition, the Scottish referendum does not qualify as a secessionist attempt. Nevertheless, the movement succeeded in bringing the question of independence to a vote and secured a remarkable degree of public support. As such, the case offers valuable insight

into the conditions under which a majority rejects secession. For this reason, the 2014 referendum is best characterised as a “non-attempt”.⁸⁴

As with the other cases, the assessment of the key variables is preceded by a brief overview of the historical development of Scottish nationalism.

The distinction between the administrative structures of Scotland and England has deep historical roots. Keating (1996) traces the origins of the Scottish state to the fourteenth century, when Scotland successfully resisted English domination and established its own parliamentary and monarchical institutions. By balancing relations between France and England, Scotland maintained its independence until the 1560s, when the Reformation shifted its alignment toward England. In 1603, the Scottish monarch James VI ascended to the English throne, initiating a dynastic union. This was followed in 1707 by the formal merging of the Scottish and English parliaments, resulting in the creation of a unified state. (Ibid., 163.)

Scottish national symbols became more widespread following the Jacobite rebellions, which were suppressed with the support of Lowland Scots. The defeat of the Jacobites reduced internal divisions within Scotland and contributed to a stronger sense of national unity. At the same time, Scottish symbols were gradually incorporated into the broader British state. Keating (1996) argues that Britain largely accommodated Scottish identity, while repression was directed more along religious lines – particularly against Catholics (163–164).

The union was notably economically beneficial for Scotland. As both Keating (1996, 163) and Anderson (2006, 90) note, the Scots gained access to the much larger English market without facing the trade barriers that, for example, restricted the Thirteen Colonies.

Furthermore, Gaelic never underwent the kind of standardisation that English did, and English had already been the language of the court in Scotland even prior to the union (Anderson, 2006, 90). The adoption of English as the common language in Scotland is also noted by Keating (1996). English became a “British” language, and the Scots spoke a dialect of it, removing language as a potential rallying point for nationalism as well.

⁸⁴ From the PBST perspective, a secessionist attempt is directed against external obstacles, whereas internal obstacles – such as insufficient popular support – must already have been overcome.

Scottish nationalism began to rise in the post-World War II period. The Scottish National Party (SNP) gained momentum following the discovery of North Sea oil, which contributes significantly to the Scottish economy – not least by providing jobs. Aspirations for increased autonomy were further reflected in the failed devolution referendum of 1979 and, later, in the successful referendum of 1997, which led to the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 (see, for example, Mitchell 2009).

Aspirations for independence escalated further when the SNP won a surprise majority in the 2011 Scottish parliamentary elections. In its manifesto, the SNP pledged to hold an independence referendum if elected to power. The UK Government expressed its preference to maintain the union but committed to respecting the outcome of the referendum even if the Scottish people voted for independence (UK Parliament Constitution Committee 2012).

Since the 2014 referendum, the political landscape has shifted significantly – most notably due to the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union in 2016. Aspirations for independence persist, and whether Scotland will remain within the union remains to be seen.⁸⁵

6.1.6 Scotland – Structured Focused Evaluation

Scotland stands out as a case in which the conditions for secessionism appear to be only weakly present. While England clearly dominates the British state,⁸⁶ Scotland is nevertheless an integral part of it – and crucially, no nation holds linguistic dominance over another in a way that results in internal cultural subjugation.

Nevertheless, the key questions for assessing the explanatory variables are:

1. Was the state of the United Kingdom materially beneficial to Scotland?
2. Were the Scottish people repressed by the state of United Kingdom?

The primary driver of Scottish secessionism appears to be that, despite devolution, significant fiscal and economic powers remain centralised in London, particularly the control over most

⁸⁵ These varying aspirations were evident in everyday conversation during the Author's student exchange in Scotland in 2023 – from fellow students to local barbers, support for independence remained a recurring theme.

⁸⁶ England had a population of approximately 56.5 million in 2021, whereas Scotland had the population of 5.48 million (Office for National Statistics 2022).

of Scotland's tax revenue and public spending framework. Nonetheless, the union does seem to offer more benefits than costs from the perspective of a majority of the population, as reflected in the outcome of the 2014 referendum.

According to the Scottish Government's (2015) report *Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 2013–14*, Scotland appears to have benefited materially from the union. In the fiscal year leading up to the referendum, Scotland's total public sector revenue was approximately £54.0 billion. This figure includes a "geographical share of North Sea revenue," referring to the hypothetical oil revenues Scotland would receive if it independently controlled the oil fields within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as defined in international maritime law. Excluding North Sea revenue, total public sector revenue would have been approximately £47.6 billion. (Scottish Government 2015.)

Notably, the revenue generated by North Sea oilfields is subject to significant fluctuations. In the previous fiscal year, 2012–2013, Scotland's total public sector revenue – with the geographical share of North Sea oil – was estimated at £56.9 billion. This represents a drop of nearly £3 billion within a single year, largely due to falling oil prices and declining production. (Scottish Government 2015.)

Instead, the same report notes that during 2013–14, public spending in Scotland totalled £66.4 billion, exceeding the revenue generated within the country by a substantial £12.4 billion. Yet, this public sector expenditure accounted for only 9.2% of the total UK public sector expenditure. (Scottish Government 2015.)

It would indeed appear that, as the sixth largest economy in the world,⁸⁷ the United Kingdom can function effectively with or without Scotland. While Scotland could potentially benefit from controlling the oil fields directly, the current arrangement seems to provide generous enough compensation in the form of steady funding, while also shielding Scotland from the risks associated with fluctuations in oil prices.

Thus, the answer to the first question is a cautious "yes": based on the available information, the state of the United Kingdom appeared to be materially beneficial to Scotland. A further comparison of GDP per capita – visible in Table 10 – supports this conclusion as well.

⁸⁷ As of 2024, Statista (2024).

Table 10. GDP per capita comparison between Scotland and the United Kingdom, 2010–2014. Source: Scotfact (n.d.). Note: all values in current-year pounds sterling.

Year	GDP per capita (£)		Difference (£) (UK – Scotland)
	Scotland	United Kingdom	
2014	27,439	30,279	2,840
2013	26,532	29,654	3,122
2012	25,358	28,793	3,435
2011	24,583	28,558	3,975
2010	23,939	27,574	3,635

As for the second question, the Scottish people were “*not repressed*” by the state of the United Kingdom – at least not in the violent or coercive sense relevant to this context. This is evident from the accounts of events leading up to the referendum and the notable absence of any reports of violence or state-led obstruction. Furthermore, the UK government explicitly accepted the possibility of secession and committed to respecting the outcome, should the Scottish people vote in favour of independence.

In sum, the case of Scotland illustrates a situation in which neither material deprivation nor repression reached the threshold necessary to generate a successful secessionist attempt – confirming its classification under PBST as a “non-attempt”.

The following section turns to the case of South Sudan, where the explanatory variables differ significantly from those observed in Scotland.

6.1.7 South Sudan – Background of the South Sudanese Secessionist Attempt

This section applies the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) to the case of South Sudan, following the same analytical structure as in the previous chapters. It examines whether the key explanatory variables – material disadvantage and repression – were present prior to the 2011 independence referendum. As before, the analysis begins with a “soaking and poking” phase that outlines the broader historical and political context.

The more one explores the case of South Sudan, the more dismal the picture becomes. South Sudanese nationhood exists only in the thinnest sense possible. The secession is more

accurately understood as a separatist project, rather than a nationalistic one in any robust or coherent form.

To compound matters, South Sudan's admission into the United Nations as a unified country only further illustrates the contradictions of de jure statehood highlighted throughout this thesis. Gaining independence from Sudan – with the borders visible on Figure 15 – on January 9, 2011, after decades of brutal conflict as a resolution of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, South Sudan remains one of the most fragile regions in the world. Secession was nearly unanimous, with approximately 97.58% of registered voters participating, with total of 98.83% cast for secession.⁸⁸ (ElectionGuide 2011.)

Its population, estimated at around 12.8 million in 2019, consists of roughly 64 ethnic groups, with the Dinka and Nuer being the most prominent (Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan in Uganda n.d.).⁸⁹

Figure 15. South Sudan (dark green) and Sudan (light green). Source: Adapted from Location South Sudan AU Africa.svg (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.), modified by Author.



⁸⁸ The referendum was held under international supervision and, despite some minor shortcomings, was widely considered legitimate. See, for example, European Union Election Observation Mission (2011).

⁸⁹ By comparison, Sudan has a significantly larger population – estimated at 42.23 million people as of 2019 (World Bank 2019).

Albeit beyond the scope of this thesis, the dire situation in South Sudan calls for a quick overview. Since its creation, the young nation has been gripped by persistent instability. A civil war broke out in 2013 between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and his then-Vice President Riek Machar. Although a peace deal was signed in 2018, its implementation has faltered. The conflict has repeatedly taken on ethnic dimensions – particularly between Dinka and Nuer factions – triggering devastating cycles of violence (The Guardian 2025). By early 2024, around 72% of South Sudan’s population required humanitarian assistance (International Rescue Committee 2025).

It is clear that secession alone has not brought peace or prosperity to South Sudan. This makes the decision to grant the state independence – along with international recognition – all the more peculiar. What follows is a soaking and poking of the events that led to this outcome, as with the previous cases.

The foundations of the contemporary situation were laid during the British conquest of Sudan from Egypt. While formally co-ruling with Egypt, Britain held effective control over Sudan from 1899 onward. During this period, the British focused their civil administrative efforts on the “Arabic” North, while the more “African, Christian, and traditional South” was largely neglected. In Southern Sudan, the British strategy was to keep the area peaceful and sufficiently stable, with no meaningful investment in infrastructure or modernisation. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

As Britain consolidated its rule, early Sudanese nationalist movements began to emerge in the 1920s. However, after crushing the 1924 rebellion and forcing out Egyptian influence, British control remained unchallenged until after the Second World War. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

British rule was eventually challenged by the emerging Sudanese elite. Recognising the rising threat of Sudanese nationalism, the British sought to co-opt this elite by bringing them into governance structures. However, the nationalists continued to press for greater power, ultimately demanding a legislative body with authority extending to Southern Sudan. During the broader wave of decolonisation, the leader of the Sudanese independence movement, Ismā‘īl al-Azharī, declared Sudan independent with a representative parliament on 1 January 1956. At the time, Sudan was already embroiled in civil war. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

Liberal democracy remained very superficial, with elected representatives advancing only their own interests. In 1958, a bloodless coup d'état brought a shift to authoritarianism under the commander-in-chief of the Sudanese army, Ibrāhīm ʿAbbūd. Between 1962 and 1964, the new regime expelled Christian missionaries and began Arabizing what little education existed in Southern Sudan. A rebellion broke out in the South in 1962. Once again, the regime lost legitimacy and was overthrown, leading to new elections in 1965. Just a few years later, in 1969, power was seized by Jaafar Nimeiri and a group of young officers dissatisfied with the government – and with the ongoing civil war, for example. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

Meanwhile, in the South, numerous rebel groups were united under General Joseph Lagu, who commanded the Anya Nya forces. Notably, Israel facilitated a global propaganda campaign for Anya Nya between 1969 and 1971 in order to sow discontent in Arab nations (Gidron 2018). Eventually, the 17-year conflict between Anya Nya and the Sudanese army ended with the Addis Ababa Agreement, which granted Southern Sudan greater autonomy, including a separate legislature and executive body. The Anya Nya were also to be integrated into the Sudanese army and police. It was during the 1970s that oil was discovered in Sudan – notably, in Southern Sudan. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

The civil war was put on hold for a while after the Addis Ababa Agreement, but resumed in full after 1983, when an army battalion rebelled against the corrupt Nimeiri and his government. The Agreement was abandoned due to various grievances, which were further exacerbated by the discovery of oil in Southern Sudan. (Shinn 2004.)

Nimeiri was eventually overthrown as well, and after several years of political restlessness, the government was seized by Omar al-Bashir. He allied with Islamic hard-liners and was widely regarded as the most unpopular ruler Sudan had seen – yet he remained in power through ruthless repression. He sided with Iraq in the Gulf War, among other things, such as inflicting famine on South Sudan. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

In Southern Sudan, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) continued to seize territory. The Sudanese army, unable to hold its ground, pitted Arab militias against their African rivals. Famines and humanitarian catastrophes persisted. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

In PBST terms, Khartoum's calculus only shifted once oil extraction turned from asset to liability.⁹⁰ Beginning in 1999, SPLA raids, mined roads and helicopter shoot-downs repeatedly disrupted the new export corridor through Unity and Upper Nile, and pipeline outages were costing Khartoum roughly 45 percent of the newfound increased state budget, accumulated after the start of pipelines in 1998. The government had become almost entirely reliant on crude oil exports, which it utilised to fund further military operations against civilians in proximity to oil-rich regions, employing advanced weaponry. (Human Rights Watch 2003). Each week the line lay idle pushed the marginal cost of war-making above the expected return from extraction.

At the same time, the United States elevated Sudan to a frontline concern in the post-9/11 War on Terror. Washington had already designated Sudan a State Sponsor of Terrorism for harbouring Osama bin Laden in the 1990s, and after 2001, it paired intensified intelligence engagement with escalating economic pressure. (US Department of State 2005.)

The Sudan Peace Act 2002 required the US president to certify "good-faith negotiations" every six months or else trigger new financial sanctions and block multilateral lending, while signalling that full diplomatic rehabilitation – including removal from the terrorism list – would follow a comprehensive settlement. (US Congress 2002.)

By sharing counter-terrorism intelligence with the CIA, Bashir's regime could now trade a 50 percent share of southern oil under peace for the lifting of sanctions that had frozen investment and access to credit (UN Security Council 2006). As a result, external actors altered the payoff calculations for the parent state: a certain half of something under peace is better than a diminishing whole under siege.

Domestically, President Bashir's dismissal of Islamist ideologue Hassan al-Turabi in December 1999 fragmented the ruling coalition and left it desperate for external legitimacy and fresh revenue streams (US Department of State 2000). The IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development)-brokered the Machakos Protocol of July 2002 – engineered and bank-rolled by the Troika of the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway – offered that lifeline, prescribing a six-year 50/50 revenue-sharing formula and a guaranteed referendum on

⁹⁰ Increased historical detail is provided here because PBST requires greater depth to capture the "whys" behind the changes, rather than just the "whats." Accordingly, the general overview offered by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is complemented by more specialised sources that focus on the financial dimensions of Sudan's violent history.

southern self-determination (IGAD Secretariat on Peace in the Sudan 2002; UN Security Council 2006).

In PBST language, regime survival had become synonymous with state survival: conceding the South and locking in future oil-transit fees was the least-costly path to preserving extraction, ending sanctions and keeping Bashir in power.

Finally, in 2005, Sudan and the Southern rebels signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), bringing the second civil war to an end. The CPA included a new constitution and a promise to hold an independence referendum in Southern Sudan in six years' time. Notably, the states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile – formally part of Northern Sudan but often aligned with the South during the war – were granted a special status not given to other northern states. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

In the years leading up to the independence referendum, there was another uprising in Darfur, a large region in the western part of Northern Sudan. In 2009, Bashir was held criminally responsible by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur. This was followed by additional charges of genocide in 2010. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.a.)

Finally, the referendum was carried out, and South Sudan was born – recognised as the world's newest de jure state on 9 July 2011. Not even two years later, the SPLA – now transformed into the army of South Sudan – split between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and those aligned with his then-vice president, Riek Machar, as noted earlier, leading to further civil war. (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.b.)

6.1.8 South Sudan – Structured Focused Evaluation

In this sub-chapter, the events and dynamics outlined above are assessed through the lens of PBST to determine the values of the two explanatory variables:

1. Was the Sudanese state materially beneficial to South Sudan?
2. Were the South Sudanese people repressed by the Sudanese state?

As with the previous cases, the analysis focuses on the conditions leading up to the formal secession attempt – in this case, the 2011 independence referendum. The case of South

Sudan differs significantly from the others, being the first case study situated in a strictly postcolonial context.

Regarding material benefit, Chowdhury's (2018) theorisation bears repeating: postcolonial states are rarely beneficial to anyone beyond the ruling elite and international corporations. Nonetheless, GDP per capita figures – visible in Table 11 – can be examined for comparison.

Table 11. GDP per capita in Sudan and South Sudan, 2008–2011. Source: CountryEconomy (n.d.d) and CountryEconomy (n.d.e).

Year	GDP per capita (US\$)		Difference (US\$) (Sudan – South Sudan)
	Sudan	South Sudan	
2011	2,034	1,685	349
2010	1,637	1,484	153
2009	1,401	1,323	78
2008	1,701	1,654	47

As shown in Table 11, both the existing and the emerging state operated under conditions of severe poverty. The historical overview above makes it clear that the Sudanese state repeatedly neglected the development of South Sudan. It was the various Southern rebel groups – rather than the central government – that secured the South a share of the oil revenues. Like many other postcolonial states, Sudan provided little benefit even to its northern population. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Sudan was *not materially beneficial* to what would become South Sudan.

Turning to the second question – whether the South Sudanese people were repressed by the Sudanese state – the answer is unambiguous: “yes”. This repression ceased only when Southern groups armed themselves, and unilateral repression escalated into a full-scale civil war.

A further note on the aftermath of independence. Sadly, the situation in South Sudan did not improve in the long term. The unrest merely shifted from intra-state to inter-factional conflict. One – though inadequate – way to capture the scale of South Sudan's plight is through GDP per capita: it dropped to \$268 in 2016, hit a low of \$176 in 2017, and had only risen to \$625 by

2023 (CountryEconomy n.d.e).⁹¹ In this case, it appears that a common enemy – Sudan – was the unifying force that brought fragmented factions together to vote for independence, which was subsequently granted. Still, the lack of any meaningful statehood remains apparent in the ongoing collapse within South Sudan.⁹²

6.1.9 Finnish Swedes: A Comparison Case – Background of the Finnish Swedes' Secessionist Non-Aspirations

The next group, the Swedish Finns, provides a comparison case demonstrating how a distinct identity, even when paired with a distinct language, is not, in itself, sufficient to give rise to secessionist aspirations – let alone attempts. While sharing certain characteristics with the case of Scotland, the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland is even more deeply integrated into the state structure.

Vincze & Henning-Lindblom (2016) summarise the current situation comprehensively:⁹³

Finland is a bilingual country with two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. Although the Swedish language group is comprised of a mere 291,000 persons; that is, 5.4% of the population of the country (Finnäs 2013); Swedish is supported by a broad institutional network, which provides extensive cultural autonomy for the Swedish language group. Among Swedish-speaking Finns, the proportion of mixed marriages has been about 40% since the 1980s, and about 60% of newborn children in mixed language families are registered as Swedish speakers, while an even higher proportion of these children attend a Swedish school (Finnäs 2013). Compared to several other minority–majority settings, the intergroup relations between Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers can overall be regarded as relatively harmonious and amicable.

⁹¹ In comparison, Sudan's GDP per capita was \$1,573 in 2016, fell to a low of \$578 in 2017, and had risen to \$2,183 by 2023 (CountryEconomy n.d.d).

⁹² What is frustrating is that South Sudan remains internationally recognised as a sovereign state, despite its near-total failure to provide development or governance. In contrast, far more capable de facto entities – such as Iraqi Kurdistan – remain excluded from recognition, despite significantly greater effectiveness.

⁹³ In their research article “*Finnish and bilingual? Multiple ethnolinguistic identities in relation to ethnolinguistic vitality in Finland*”

Next follows a brief and focused historical overview of Finland, with particular interest in the Swedish language and its speakers.

The Finnish Swedes are a minority who have historically been better off than the Finnish-speaking majority. Finland was conquered by the Swedes during the 12th century through crusades, only stopping upon encountering the Novgorodians – non-Moscow-led Russians. This marked the beginning of Swedish rule over the territory that would later become modern-day Finland. (See, for example, Kirby 2006, 1–29.)⁹⁴

Swedish rule lasted for roughly 500 years, during which Swedish became the language of administration and government. During this period, settlers from what is now Sweden migrated to what is now Finland, where they often became manor lords ruling over a Finnish-speaking peasantry. (See, for example, Kirby 2006, 30–104).

In the 1500s, a written standard of the Finnish language was developed – driven in part by the Protestant demand that people be able to read the Bible in their own vernacular (see, for example, Kirby 2006, 40).

Only after the annexation of Finland by the Russian Empire in 1809 did the conception of “Finland” as a distinct entity begin to emerge. The country retained its advanced Swedish institutions, as the Russian equivalents were considered backwards by comparison. By the late 1800s, Romantic nationalism was in full bloom in Finland. At the same time – or perhaps as a consequence – proto-Finland, enjoying extensive autonomy within the Empire, underwent its political awakening. (See, for example, Kirby 2006, 105–149.)

For the emerging nation, the language question was a central one. It was only in 1883 that Finland’s autonomous legislative body elevated Finnish to equal status with Swedish as a government language. Many of the most prominent figures in the nationalist movement – particularly artists and writers advocating for the Finnish language – were Swedish-speaking themselves. As a result, the Finnish nation was, from the beginning, essentially constructed as bilingual. (See, for example, Kirby 2006, 105–149.)

⁹⁴ The narrative in this section draws on the author’s personal familiarity with Finnish history and society, developed through the Finnish school system and a minor in contemporary history. While not all claims are directly sourced from academic literature, they have been cross-checked and found consistent with established historical accounts, such as Kirby (2006).

Upon gaining independence, the first constitution of Finland determined that both Swedish and Finnish were the official languages. This was after a bloody civil war was fought among the socialists and anti-socialists, where language was not a reason for the conflict.⁹⁵ (See, for example, Kirby 2006, 150-196.)

While there has been no widely documented secessionism among mainland Finnish Swedes, Åland – the large island, or group of islands to be exact, between Finland and Sweden – did pursue irredentist unification with Sweden in 1921. In what became the only dispute ever successfully resolved by the League of Nations, Åland was ruled to remain within the newly independent Finnish state, but was granted extensive autonomy. (See, for example, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland [n.d].)

While Ålanders have maintained a strong and distinct identity, the Finnish Swedes on the mainland have been, for the most part, a frictionless part of the Finnish nation, the Finnish people, and the Finnish state. Their language and identity have remained distinct but never developed into separatist aspirations.

As noted earlier, the Finnish state goes out of its way to accommodate the Swedish-speaking minority. Since the 1970s, Swedish has been a mandatory subject in basic education – a decision widely understood to have been political rather than pedagogical in nature – and the policy remains in place today.⁹⁶ At the university level, Finnish-speaking students are required to pass the compulsory *virkamiesruotsi* (“government Swedish”) course, and vice versa.⁹⁷

Contemporarily, Finnish Swedes largely self-identify as part of the Finnish nation: 17% viewed “Finnish Swedishness” as belonging to their own distinct culture, separate from Finnishness, while 82% understood it as belonging to their own culture that is nonetheless part of Finnish identity overall.⁹⁸ As noted earlier, there is virtually no state-level discrimination against the Swedish-speaking population, although the availability of essential services in Swedish has varied across regions and is viewed as a point of grievance by some. (See Folktinget 2006.)

⁹⁵ The framing of the 1918 conflict is highly debated, with competing labels ranging from “civil war” to “class war,” “freedom war,” and “revolution.” It is widely speculated that had the Red (socialist) side emerged victorious, Finland would likely have joined the Soviet Union. In either case, the war laid bare the harsh conditions of the rural and working poor, leading to post-war legislation that made the Finnish state economically more just.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Kielilakikomitea (2000).

⁹⁷ The course notoriously serves as the final obstacle to graduation for many.

⁹⁸ Based on a 2005 study (N=820) (Folktinget 2006).

In the same study, 29% of respondents reported having experienced harassment or bullying related to their culture a long time ago, 5% reported having experienced it recently, and 66% reported never having experienced it at all. (Folktinget 2006.)

Financially, there are few to no differences between Finnish Swedes and Finnish-speaking Finns. According to a 2024 study by Åbo Akademi, Swedish-speaking men earned on average 17 percent more than Finnish-speaking men, while Swedish-speaking women earned only 2 percent more than their Finnish-speaking counterparts in Southern Finland. In other Swedish-speaking regions, namely the northwestern coast, income levels are either comparable to Finnish speakers or slightly lower (Härtull & Saarela 2024).

As noted, no secessionist or autonomist aspirations have arisen among the Finnish Swedes, nor has there been any secessionist attempt – discounting the Ålanders, who consider themselves just that: Ålanders, not Finnish Swedes.

Next, the group of Finnish Swedes are examined through the PBST framework.

6.1.10 Finnish Swedes: A Comparison Case – Structured Focused Evaluation

In this sub-chapter, the historical background and sociopolitical development of the Finnish Swedish minority is assessed through the lens of Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) to determine the values of the two explanatory variables:

1. Is the Finnish state materially beneficial to the Finnish Swedes?
2. Are the Finnish Swedes repressed by the Finnish state?

To answer the first question, the Finnish state *appears to be materially beneficial* to the Finnish Swedes. For a long time, Swedish was considered the language of education and of the “better people,” while Finnish had to catch up in terms of status and institutional presence. Swedish speakers had a natural advantage as the native users of the administrative and educational language. That privileged position has largely been maintained: Swedish speakers can educate themselves from daycare to university entirely in their mother tongue. Financially, the Finnish Swedes are either indistinguishable from Finnish speakers or slightly advantaged.

As for the second question, the Finnish Swedes are not repressed by the Finnish state. The only notable language-based injustices they have faced appear to stem from individual encounters rather than systemic discrimination – and even those are reportedly uncommon.⁹⁹

6.1.11 Summary of the Analysis (E1)

Table 12 below summarises the Phase 1 variables of PBST as derived from the preceding case studies. These cases support the plausibility of the first part of PBST, which explains the formation of secessionist aspirations, as each aligns with the extraction-based logic – even the more ambiguous case of Scotland.

Table 12. Summary of Phase 1 variables in case study cases. Source: Author's compilation.

Secessionist area – Parent state	Material non-benefit	Repression	Secessionist movement present?
Catalonia – Spain	Yes (Persistent fiscal deficit)	No	Yes
Iraqi Kurdistan – Iraq	Yes (Contested oil revenue & budget shortfalls)	Yes (Historical mass violence)	Yes
Scotland – UK	No (Net fiscal transfer to region)	No	Yes (But classified as “non-attempt”)
South Sudan – Sudan	Yes (Extraction without development)	Yes (Civil-war repression)	Yes
Finnish Swedes – Finland	No (State materially beneficial)	No	No

⁹⁹ It should be noted that the Finnish Swedes were selected specifically as a control case, and even asking whether they are repressed may feel insensitive after posing the same question in the context of South Sudan. This footnote is intended as a reminder that the analytical structure is not meant to equate cases morally or experientially; there is no intention to downplay the severity of repression faced in earlier cases by applying the same framework here.

The application of Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST) for plausibility probing has shown that material non-benefit and repression may be strong indicators for the emergence of secessionist movements. In the case studies of South Sudan and Iraqi Kurdistan, both variables were present, and significant secessionist movements developed, while in the case of Catalonia, the result was a less extreme secessionist movement.

In contrast, the comparison case of Finnish Swedes – a group with strong identity markers – have not sought secession, as neither repression nor material non-benefit was present. Scotland presents a mixed case with its “non-attempt”: the secessionists being unable to muster the majority behind their cause. The lack of repression and the debatable material benefits of the Union led to the majority of Scots being against independence.

The next section presents the analysis operationalising Phase 3 of PBST for the cases of Catalonia, Scotland, and South Sudan.

6.2 Analysis for the Second Empirical Question

In this sub-section, the second research question is answered:

E2: Can extraction interests plausibly account for the stance parent states and external actors take toward independence attempts?

This sub-chapter continues to examine the cases introduced and explored in the last sub-chapter of 4.1, where applicable.

The analysis that follows serves as a *plausibility test* of PBST’s explanatory capacity rather than a definitive measurement of actor intentions or outcomes. The variables assigned are derived from structured, theory-guided interpretation rather than comprehensive empirical verification. In many instances, especially with external actors, a full determination of cost-benefit logics would require deep bilateral analysis, including confidential or classified economic and strategic data.

Such depth is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, this chapter aims to demonstrate the analytical utility of PBST by assessing whether its assumptions produce coherent, historically plausible outcomes. All coded values should therefore be treated as interpretively grounded

indicators, useful for evaluating theoretical alignment rather than for producing empirically exhaustive claims.

6.2.1 Catalonia – Cost-Benefit Analysis

In this section, the reactions of Spain (the parent state) and external actors to the 2017 Catalan referendum are evaluated according to the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory framework.

On the first of October, 2017, the autonomous community of Catalonia held a unilateral independence referendum in defiance of the Spanish Constitutional Court, which had declared the vote illegal. Despite significant logistical obstacles and widespread police intervention, a reported 2,286,217 ballots were cast, with 90.18 percent in favour of independence, 7.83 percent against, and 1.98 percent left blank or otherwise invalid. According to the Catalan government, the turnout was approximately 43.03 percent of the eligible voting population. (Generalitat de Catalunya 2017.)

Notably, the turnout rate falls below the 50 percent threshold required to be considered a secession attempt, as established in chapter 3.3.2. While some Catalans boycotted the vote, the violent police crackdowns likely impacted people's willingness to risk their health and participate in the voting process. Because of this, combined with the Spanish central government's violent actions legitimising the vote, the case is treated as a secession attempt.

Drawing on the structured-focused comparison, the following analysis explicitly assesses the variables of extraction gain, state-making costs, and spillover risk for Spain, as well as war-making reduction, spillover risk, and extraction impact for external actors, based on available evidence and secondary sources. The results are summarised in Table 13 below.

As for the rationality check, both Spain and the EU can be fairly assumed to be high-bargaining states, being old European centralised democracies, and thus rational.

Table 13. Cost-benefit analysis for parent state and external actors in Catalanian case. Source: Author's compilation.

Actor	Variable	Ordinal Value	Brief Justification
Parent State – Spain	Extraction Gain	Moderate	Catalonia provides a net positive extractive benefit (high GDP contribution and fiscal deficit).
	Cost of State-Making Required to Diffuse	Low	Secessionist attempt was non-violent; no major infrastructure or military investment required.
	Spillover Risk	High	Strong risk of triggering comparable demands in the Basque Country or Galicia.
External Actors – The European Union	Hostile War-Making Reduction	None	Spain and Catalonia are both within the EU security framework; no expected shift in war-making dynamics.
	Domestic Spillover Risk	Baseline	State's baseline reluctance to change status quo.
	Negative impact on Spanish Extraction	None	As a member state Spain is an ally to the EU. Catalonia would have likely applied as an EU member state, resulting in no significant change for the EU.

In the case of Catalonia, the parent state, Spain, acted in a manner that aligns closely with the logic outlined by PBST.

Catalonia represented a *net extractive benefit* to Spain: Catalonia enjoyed a significantly higher GDP per capita than the Spanish average. Although exact figures remain politically contested, the economic asymmetry between the region and the broader state supports the conclusion that Catalonia was, from an extractive perspective, valuable to retain. Thus, Spain had clear material incentives to oppose the secession attempt.

From a state-making perspective, the cost of diffusing the movement was low. The 2017 referendum was conducted peacefully and without military escalation from the Catalan side. Although the Spanish state responded with a significant police force on the day of the vote, the secessionist movement itself did not require the state to rebuild infrastructure, engage in war-making, or mobilise new institutions. As a result, the repression of the movement did not

incur costs beyond the existing coercive apparatus – making it a textbook case of PBST’s “violence cost buffer” dynamic.

The spillover risk, however, was high. Spain’s political elite had arguably legitimate concerns that granting Catalonia independence would embolden comparable movements in other regions – most notably the Basque Country,¹⁰⁰ which has a longer history of violent secessionist conflict. Although Galicia also possesses some regionalist sentiment, the Basque case in particular presented a clear precedent risk. This might explain why the Spanish response was so ruthless despite the Catalan attempt being peaceful.

As for external actors, particularly the European Union, their response was shaped by the logic of self-preservation and symbolic stability. The European Union is treated here as an ambiguous mix of its member states and permanent institutions, which arguably reflects its true nature as well. There was no considerable material benefit to be gained from supporting Catalonia. Both Spain and an independent Catalonia would remain within the EU’s economic and security umbrella; the secession would not have weakened any geopolitical rivals nor altered the war-making balance within Europe. Thus, the war-making reduction variable does not apply, and no strategic advantage could be leveraged.

The domestic spillover risk, however, carried latent weight. Although the EU functions as an institutional body, it is ultimately composed of member states – some of which, such as Belgium and Italy, face internal secessionist movements of their own. Supporting Catalonia could be interpreted as legitimising secession more broadly, thereby challenging the internal legitimacy of other EU member states. As theorised in PBST, other states with no active or lingering secessionist aspirations within them still hold the baseline opposition to secession, and this was not overcome with gains to be expected from Catalonia’s independence. The EU thus had little incentive to support recognition, even if Catalonia had succeeded in breaking away.

Finally, there was no extractive incentive for external actors to intervene. Spain, as a functioning EU member, provided stable access to economic flows, logistics, and market integration. If Catalonia had seceded, it would likely have reapplied for EU membership or

¹⁰⁰ For more on Basque Country separatism see, for example, Whitfield (2014).

formed strong economic ties with the bloc. No significant shift in extraction opportunities or threats would have likely emerged.

The events unfolded following PBST logic. As for the parent state, Spain, the cost for state-making required to counter the secessionist attempt fell within the “violence cost buffers” limits, while the expected extraction from the area would significantly offset the non-existent costs required to keep the area within Spain’s sphere of influence. On top of the extractive benefits, the significant spillover risks further increased the costs of allowing the referendum to happen. Therefore, PBST would have expected the outcome which unfolded: Spain denounced the referendum and took measures to counter the attempt.

As for the external actors, the reactions were anticlimactic, essentially culminating in the European Commission's statement stating that the referendum was not legal under Spain’s constitution and furthermore that the Commission considered it an internal matter of Spain. In addition to this, various European leaders published statements on Twitter, mostly condemning the use of violence by the Spanish police against the voters. There was notably no talk of self-determination of peoples, and instead the referendum was considered an internal matter of Spain, with occasional remarks of the need to abide by the Spanish constitution.¹⁰¹ Notably, Scotland’s First Minister at the time condemned the UK’s prime minister’s lukewarm response as “shamefully weak”. (DW 2017.)

The external actors’ reactions were thus according to the PBST’s predictions, ambivalent and slightly against independence, as they had no reason which would outweigh the baseline resistance to secession.

While a full analysis of developments following the 2017 referendum is beyond the scope of this thesis it is worth noting that the Catalan question remains unresolved, with the Spanish state continuing to assert central control and Catalan institutions pursuing varying degrees of autonomy and symbolic resistance.

¹⁰¹ The European leaders’ statements reflect the status quo prone attitudes, which can hide behind the liberal notions of constitutionalism. How is a minority supposed to reach a majority – yet alone a 2/3 majority – required for their independence to be realised via constitutional ways?

6.2.2 Scotland – Cost-Benefit Analysis

The Scottish independence referendum, deemed a non-attempt due to its outcome for the Union, is another example that follows PBST logic. The referendum was held in 2014 with a total electorate of 4,283,392 and a turnout of 84.59%. Of the votes cast, 55.3% voted “No” and 44.7% voted “Yes.” A clear majority of the eligible population opposed secession. (BBC News 2014.)

Table 14. Cost-benefit analysis for the parent state and external actors in the Scottish case. Source: Author’s compilation.

Actor	Variable	Ordinal Value	Brief Justification
Parent State – The United Kingdom	Extraction Gain	Low	The UK typically spends more on Scotland than it receives in taxes, especially in years with low oil prices, reducing the net extractive benefit of retaining Scotland.
	Cost of State-Making Required to Diffuse	None	The UK is not undertaking measures which would bring significant additional costs to keep Scotland in the union.
	Spillover Risk	Low	There is a slight chance that other members of the Union, Wales and Northern Ireland, could start seeking their independence as well.
External Actors – The European Union	Hostile War-Making Reduction	None	The UK and Scotland are both within the Euro-Atlantic security architecture; secession would not impact the regional security balance.
	Domestic Spillover Risk	Baseline	The EU maintains a baseline reluctance to encourage secessionism, especially where internal member state legitimacy may be affected.
	Negative impact on the EU Extraction	None	An independent Scotland would likely seek EU membership and economic integration, maintaining existing extractive flows without major disruption.

In the case of Scotland, the United Kingdom’s reaction to the independence movement aligns closely with PBST expectations under conditions of low extraction gain and low state-making cost. The results are visible in Table 14.

From the perspective of material extraction, Scotland is not a strongly net-positive region for the UK. Although it contributes valuable economic activity – particularly through its financial sector and the North Sea oil fields – public spending in Scotland has historically exceeded its tax contributions. Given the declining importance of oil and the relative balance between tax revenue and public spending, Scotland cannot be considered a critical extractive asset in the same way as, for example, Catalonia. Accordingly, the UK's material incentive to prevent secession is relatively limited.

From a state-making perspective, the cost of suppressing or diffusing the independence movement has been minimal. The 2014 independence referendum was legally sanctioned, peacefully conducted, and politically negotiated within the UK's democratic framework, with the UK allowing the referendum to happen and agreeing to honour its outcome. Since then, no significant security measures, infrastructure investments, or coercive campaigns have been undertaken to keep Scotland in the union. Thus, under PBST, the UK's behaviour fits the profile of a rational actor that incurs no additional state-making costs in its attempt to retain the territory.

In terms of spillover risk, the threat of additional secessionist movements elsewhere in the UK has been present but mild. Wales maintains a nationalist current, and Northern Ireland's situation – especially post-Brexit – remains politically sensitive. However, neither posed an imminent threat of secession comparable to Scotland's political coherence and electoral mobilisation. For this reason, the UK's response does not appear motivated by an urgent fear of systemic unravelling, and the spillover risk can be classified as low.

Turning to external actors, particularly the European Union, the PBST framework suggests minimal strategic or extractive incentives for intervention. First, there is no benefit to war-making capacity that would arise from Scottish independence. The United Kingdom and Scotland are both firmly embedded within the Euro-Atlantic security infrastructure. Secession would not affect NATO alignment or reduce the military potential of any state considered a threat to EU stability. There is thus no gain to be made by weakening a rival, and this variable is scored accordingly.

As in the Catalonia case, the EU's domestic spillover risk remains at the baseline. While Scotland's independence would not directly affect member states, the broader symbolism of

a peaceful and democratic secessionist success story might embolden subnational movements elsewhere. As such, the EU has continued its characteristic reluctance to be seen as endorsing secession, even in a context where the democratic legitimacy of the process is broadly accepted.

Finally, there is no impact on extractive flows. An independent Scotland would likely seek EU membership or strong economic integration with the bloc. Trade, investment, and taxation flows would remain stable. There is no extractive incentive to either oppose or support the movement, and EU member states therefore have no material motivation to push for Scottish independence.

In sum, the reactions of both the United Kingdom and the European Union to Scotland's secessionist efforts conform closely to PBST predictions. When the secessionist area is only occasionally beneficial, and even then little in absolute terms, and when there are no other factors in play, the parent state is expected to be ambivalent to the secession. This was the case with the Scottish referendum, as can be inferred from the UK allowing the referendum to take place – even though the majority vote was eventually against secession.¹⁰²

6.2.3 South Sudan – Cost-Benefit Analysis

On 9 January 2011 the people of Southern Sudan voted in the referendum promised by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Turn-out was 97.6 %, and 98.8 % of the total ballots were cast in favour of independence; Khartoum accepted the result, and South Sudan became sovereign on 9 July 2011. This outcome looks puzzling for Post-Bellicist logic, because the South held roughly three-quarters of Sudan's proven oil-fields, while all export, refining and financial infrastructure lay in the North. Why did a hard-line regime surrender so valuable an asset? The outcomes of the most convoluted cost-benefit analysis yet are visible in the Table 15 below.

¹⁰² Yet, the baseline opposition for secessions became visible in the European Commission's spokesperson stating "the Barroso doctrine" would apply, which means that if a part of an EU member state became independent, it would have to apply independently for EU membership should also be noted that José Manuel Barroso, after whom the doctrine is named said that it would be "extremely difficult, if not impossible" for Scotland to join the EU, as Spain is not even recognising Kosovo – another secessionist state – as independent to keep Catalonia in line. (Independent 2017.)

Table 15. Cost-benefit analysis for parent state and external actors in the South Sudanese case. Source: Author's compilation.

Actor	Variable	Ordinal value	Brief justification
Parent state – Sudan	Extraction gain	Low	Oil was ~45 % of Khartoum's budget after 1999; nearly all fields lay in the South. Yet pipeline sabotage and shoot-downs meant greatly reduced access to oil extraction.
	Cost of state-making needed to diffuse	High	Retaining the South required a counter-insurgency the army could no longer finance without uninterrupted crude exports.
	Spill-over risk	Medium	Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan watched the CPA closely, but were already rebelling.
External actor – Troika (US / UK / Norway)	Hostile war-making reduction	Low	Peace removed Sudan from the U.S. terrorism docket and cemented post-9/11 intelligence ties.
	Domestic spill-over risk	Baseline	No secessionist constituencies inside the Troika states.
	Negative impact on Troika extraction	None	Independence and the peace that comes with it would only increase the possibility of extraction from the South Sudan region.
External actor – African Union	Hostile war-making reduction	Low	Sudan wasn't hostile to the African Union at large in any meaningful way, and thus, only minor war-making reduction was to be achieved by South Sudan's independence.
	Domestic spill-over risk	High	"Uti possidetis" is central to AU legitimacy.
	Negative impact on AU extraction	None	AU as an institution has no direct revenue stake, nor did other African countries to significant amount; oil flows and fees remained a bilateral Sudan–South Sudan issue.

External actor – Egypt	Hostile war-making reduction	None	Cairo preferred a united Sudan to preserve upstream leverage on Nile waters; independence gave Ethiopia & Uganda more influence over Juba. If anything, the independence would only potentially increase the costs.
	Domestic spill-over risk	Baseline	No significant secessionist minorities inside Egypt.
	Negative impact on Egyptian extraction	Low	Independence broke the colonial-era status quo, allocating Nile use to Egypt/Sudan; Cairo recognised the new state on 9 Jul 2011 but remained wary of future water treaties. Dealing with Christian South Sudan could be more costly than before with Sudan.

As detailed earlier (in sub-section 5.1.4), Khartoum's dependency on Southern oil revenue, coupled with costly security needs due to SPLA disruptions, raised the marginal costs of continuing war-making above extractive benefits.

The Sudanese rationale for overcoming this is evident from the pressures it faced and the means available to regain access to extraction. Domestically, Bashir's December 1999 purge of Hassan al-Turabi fractured the Islamist coalition and left the regime short of cash and international backing. The U.S. State Department noted that Bashir "dismissed the speaker of parliament ... and declared a state of emergency" two days before a vote limiting presidential powers. (U.S. Department of State 2000.) Without Turabi's Gulf donors, Khartoum depended on sanctions relief, which, as described previously (4.1.4), the US-led Troika used together with diplomatic normalisation as leverage to push Khartoum toward peace talks

From Khartoum's viewpoint, a guaranteed 50 percent share of southern oil (plus transit fees) under peace now outweighed a shrinking 100 % share under siege. Conceding the referendum preserved a revenue stream, lifted the most damaging sanctions and kept the ruling officers in power – the logic PBST predicts for a VNR-dependent low-bargaining state.

Sudan, therefore, moved from violent resistance to *strategic unravelling* – allowing independence while locking in transit rents. The Troika's calibrated pressure and incentives

shifted the payoff matrix exactly as PBST expects: half of something under peace beats an ever-dwindling whole under war.

Moving on to external actors, for Washington and its partners, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement offered a rare war-making reduction dividend. By 2001, Khartoum was already on the U.S. State-Sponsor-of-Terrorism list; the Sudan Peace Act 2002 made fresh sanctions automatic if “good-faith negotiations” faltered, while holding out full rehabilitation once a deal was signed (US Congress 2002). Cooperating on counter-terrorism after 9/11 gave Bashir a clear pathway off that list, so a negotiated split looked preferable to endless low-grade warfare that tied up CIA resources and kept sanctions in place. As none of the Troika states faces an internal secession threat, the domestic spill-over risk was judged negligible – thus baseline. Finally, investors likely calculated that even an independent South would still need Port Sudan for exports, guaranteeing transit fees and lowering political-risk premia for future field development – hence the “none” evaluation on extraction: the Troika had only to gain from the independence and the assumed peace stemming from it.¹⁰³

As for the AU, its Peace-and-Security Council had long treated Sudan’s civil war as a continental liability. Its communiqué of 8 February 2011 “applaud[ed] the success of the referendum” and urged both parties to finalise a peaceful transition. (African Union Commission 2011.) Endorsing the secession, and the assumed peace coming along with it, meant one less interstate conflict for AU peacekeepers to police. The Sudanese conflict was well confined within Sudan, and didn’t pose immediate war-making gains for the AU. Sudan was not to be expected to turn hostile towards any other African country once it had military resources available which were previously tied to Southern Sudan.

Yet the Union’s founding norm of territorial integrity created a very high latent spill-over risk: recognition of South Sudan could embolden secessionist movements from Cabinda to Somaliland. Uti possidetis -principle is crucial for the low-bargaining, fragile African states, and granting one successive state might open Pandora's box.¹⁰⁴ Finally, because the AU as an

¹⁰³ Even though oil revenues have been sufficient to fuel local conflict for over 50 years, South Sudan’s oil production remains globally insignificant – likely contributing to the perception among external actors that the region is not strategically vital. With an estimated global share of just 0.18%, South Sudan produces roughly 5% of Kuwait’s daily output, for example. (Production estimates based on Voronoi 2024.)

¹⁰⁴ During the UN General Assembly, where South Sudan was granted UN membership, the representative of South Africa, speaking for the African Group, noted that even amidst all the celebrations of what was deemed a

institution earns no direct oil rents, nor do any other significant members of the AU benefit from the Sudanese situation, the change in extraction was essentially none.

The last external actor, Egypt, is included due to its constant involvement in Sudan during its history, as well as its interest stemming from the Nile. A united Sudan had long partnered with Egypt to defend the 1959 water-sharing agreement. The Egyptian government was apparently trusting enough that South Sudan could be reasoned with as well, which led to Egypt's foreign minister, Mohammed el-Orabi, publicly recognising South Sudan on 9 July 2011, only hours after the flag-raising in Juba (Sudan Tribune 2011). Recognition preserved Egyptian influence with the new government but the calculus still scored "low" on extraction – as an independent South could, in future, align with Ethiopia over Blue-Nile projects. Hostile war-making reduction was judged as "none" too, for the potential costs for dealing with the Christian South Sudan would likely only be higher in the future than what they were with the Egypt-aligned Sudan. Lastly, as Egypt faced no meaningful separatist constituencies of its own, the domestic spill-over risk was baseline.

As it turned out, every actor was in support of the independence of South Sudan, despite this being seemingly against the state logic of maximising extraction with the actors of the African Union and Egypt. This is explored more in-depth in the next section.

6.2.4 Summary of the Analysis (E2)

This subchapter summarises the findings from the cost-benefit analyses of the Catalonia, Scotland, and South Sudan cases, focusing on whether the behaviour of parent states and external actors conformed to the extractive logic proposed by PBST. The summary is visible in Table 16.

Regarding the responses to independence referendums, parent state and external actor behaviour consistently aligned with the extractive interests – supporting the PBST logic. Scotland was able to hold its independence referendum, with the UK acknowledging the end result in advance. In contrast, Spain cracked down on the referendum vote, deeming it illegal. These reactions are in line with the PBST logic, as Scotland was often worth less extraction-

victory for peace, the admission of South Sudan was merely an exception to the adherence to colonial borders, and "in no way creates a precedent for separatist tendencies". Yet, it obviously does?

wise than what it netted to the UK, whereas Catalonia was a net provider to Spain. While the two cases played out according to PBST, the case of South Sudan did not do so fully. This calls for closer scrutiny.

Table 16. Summary of E2 Actor Reactions and PBST Consistency.

Case	Actor Parent state (P)	Key variables of the actor	Outcome	Actor Reaction	PBST Consistency
Catalonia	Spain (P)	Net extractor, high spillover risk	Blocked	Opposes	Yes
	EU	No extractive gain, baseline spillover risk	N/A	Opposes	Yes
Scotland	UK (P)	Net subsidiser, high spillover risk	Failed (No vote)	Permissive	Yes
	EU	No extractive gain, baseline spillover risk	N/A	Non-committal	Yes
South Sudan	Sudan (P)	Net extractor with high cost	Passed	Accepts	Yes
	Troika (US/UK/Norway)	No extractive gain, moderate war-making reduction	N/A	Supports	Yes
	African Union	No extractive gain, high spillover risk	N/A	Supports	No
	Egypt	No direct extractive gain	N/A	Supports	No

For the parent state, Sudan, the decision to accept the peace deal and ultimately South Sudan's independence aligned with extractive interests. The costs of war-making and repression had risen steeply, as the state-making required to merely sustain intermittent oil profits had become disproportionately high. The extraction gains from maintaining control no longer justified the costs, especially as armed rebellion in the South was already in full effect,

thus reducing the added spillover risk of granting independence. In this context, Sudan's decision appears rational from an extractive standpoint.

In contrast, the African Union's support for South Sudanese independence does not follow PBST's extractive logic. Postcolonial African states typically rest on external legitimacy and suffer from low bargaining capacity, which inhibits their ability to provide state functions such as the mentioned human rights. As such, the sanctity of colonial borders is critical for preserving their current extractive arrangements. Supporting the fracturing of these borders – without clear benefits – threatens to undermine their own future capacity for extraction.

Egypt's position is similarly difficult to justify through cost-benefit logic. Its material interest in South Sudan's independence was marginal at best, and any potential gains were likely outweighed by strategic concerns, such as managing relations with a new, Christian-majority state along the Nile.

The most plausible explanation for this apparent irrationality lies with the final external actor: the Troika, primarily representing U.S. interests. While even the U.S. had only modest material gains at stake, its global power projection during the early 2000s allowed it to tip the scales.¹⁰⁵ Both the AU and Egypt were persuaded behind the scenes that South Sudanese independence would somehow align with their interests, or they deviated from extractive logic entirely, acting under a lapse of state logic and on the sincere belief that independence might improve conditions for South Sudan's population.

In each case, parent state and external reactions broadly conformed to PBST's extractive logic once the full costs of repression and the strategic context were accounted for. Unfortunately, the hopes tied to South Sudanese independence – particularly the expectation of lasting peace and prosperity – proved severely misplaced. Viewed through the PBST lens, what the secession achieved was not stability, but rather the replacement of one contesting faction in a broader free-for-all that sadly sometimes characterises postcolonial state dynamics.

In total, the cost-benefit analyses reinforce the central proposition of PBST: actors support or oppose secession based on the shifting calculus stemming from extractive logic.

¹⁰⁵ Much like a regular state comes with a "violence cost buffer," a superpower might come with a significantly larger and global "violence cost buffer".

7 Discussion – On the Explanatory Power of Post-Bellicism: Lessons from Secession

In this chapter, the results of the analysis as well as the broader implications of the PBST are discussed, followed by deliberation on the course which IL should take to improve the realisation of self-determination of peoples. This is subsequently followed by final remarks.

The findings of the analysis affirm PBST's explanatory power: where repression and material non-benefit align, secessionist movements are more likely to emerge. Where parent states calculate high extraction losses from granting independence – in the form of both direct extraction losses, as well as in the form of spillover risk – they are more likely to repress or oppose secession. PBST thus appears to succeed in linking the historical-material logic of state formation with contemporary decisions surrounding secession.

Thus, both empirical questions are answered with a resounding “yes”. For E1, the answer is: Material non-benefit and repression, as theorised in PBST, can account for the emergence of secessionist movements. As for the E2: Extraction interests can plausibly account for the stance parent states and external actors take towards independence attempts. The biggest weaknesses the theory appears to have stem from the need to have lengthy operationalisation on a case-by-case basis.

The theoretical question of “How can Post-Bellicism explain secession” is covered extensively in chapter 4 Constructing the Post-Bellicist Secession Theory, and the insights of the theory are provided with preliminary proof, with the reassuring results of both E1 and E2.

At a broader theoretical level, the findings of this thesis reinforce and extend Post-Bellicism by developing PBST as a derived – rather than ad hoc – theory of secession. While Chowdhury demonstrated how weak states fail to provide human rights, this thesis expands his critique into the realm of self-determination. PBST links Tilly's war-extraction logic to the emergence of secessionist movements and state resistance, illustrating how state behaviour remains rooted in material imperatives. The application of PBST to secession thus demonstrates the viability of Post-Bellicism as a more general theory, showing that it can function as both a theoretical lens and an empirical tool capable of plausibly explaining the phenomenon under study.

Future research could apply PBST to a broader range of cases: Kosovo, East Timor, Eritrea, and Somaliland, among others. Iraqi Kurdistan also merits more thorough analysis, which was limited in this thesis due to resource constraints.¹⁰⁶ Such applications would help refine the theory and test its explanatory reach. Other major states where minorities have been accommodated by the state would make for fruitful analysis as well.¹⁰⁷ The theory's insights could also be applied to predict a secessionist attempt as one emerges, provided there is sufficient data available.

Importantly, the identified notion of “state unravelling” invites further research, as neither Tilly nor Chowdhury theorises the lessening of the state, focusing instead on its formation and consolidation. The concept of state unravelling could prove valuable in assessing the erosion of bargained state institutions and its potential impact on the general willingness to defend the state. Similarly, the idea of “levels of bargaining” warrants further exploration, both in terms of conceptual development and operationalisation.

Furthermore, as noted, operationalisation of repression and material non-benefit remains an open challenge. Clearer, more measurable indicators would enhance the comparative validity of the concepts. Additionally, PBST could be contrasted with other theories of secession. However, PBST holds a key advantage – it is not constructed as a narrow, situational framework but instead rooted in a grand theory of state formation.

7.1 On Critiques of Bellicism

As for a note on the critiques that have been directed at Tilly's Bellicist paradigm. Many of the most persistent criticisms are effectively addressed by Chowdhury's (2018) amendments. The objection that not all wars make states is met by Chowdhury's refinement: only *costly but winnable* wars tend to result in successful state-making. The critique of Eurocentrism also loses much of its force once one accepts Chowdhury's insight that the contemporary state

¹⁰⁶ The cases of Iraqi Kurdistan and Somaliland are particularly interesting, as the secessionist movements seem to be “stuck” in their de facto independence – their situation is already in equilibrium, and they appear to lack a crisis to draw international attention to their plight. For further insight into the tricky situation of de facto states and their tactical “dead end”, see Griffiths (2021).

¹⁰⁷ Not excluding Northern Ireland, where seemingly impossible, yet a functional compromise was accomplished.

system is itself an extension of the European model – virtually all modern states operate within institutional templates derived from Europe’s war-forged state system.¹⁰⁸

This thesis complements the former insight by further scrutinising the role of the international legal regime in enforcing and perpetuating these institutional forms. The major critique that Tilly neglects internal and national dynamics is addressed through Chowdhury’s incorporation of Spruyt’s (1996) argument on institutional variation and Anderson’s (2006) concept of imagined communities.

While these additions move the theory forward, it is true that the critique Bellicism faces on the basis of the power of perceived state legitimacy, as well as nationalism, is not fully settled. However, PBST offers a materialist resolution: while distinct identities and cultures may persist across state borders, secessionist aspirations tend to arise only where populations are either materially disadvantaged by the state or actively repressed by it. Nationalism, in this view, is a *secondary effect* of failed inclusion, not a root cause of state birth.

Finally, those who critique Tilly by pointing to decolonisation as evidence that war is not necessary for state formation may wish to reconsider their criteria. If the standard for statehood includes the ability to provide meaningful rights and protections to one’s population, then it must be acknowledged that the decolonisation wave produced relatively few states that meet that bar.

7.2 Implications for a More Just International Law and State System

Practitioners and policymakers should consider the support provided by the thesis for Chowdhury’s (2018) normative call for local, layered governance structures in contexts where states have failed. As demonstrated, formal independence alone does not solve state weakness or ensure human rights.

¹⁰⁸ It could be argued that European-style state institutions would have emerged in other regions as well, given sufficient pressure for their development. For example, the Chinese Empire independently constructed centralised institutions through war-making, yet these foundations gradually eroded in the absence of costly but winnable wars – there were no rivals left to challenge the Empire. For an application of Tillyan logic to the Chinese case, see Hui (2004) and Hui (2016).

Where feasible, empowering smaller-scale governance could reduce repression and non-benefit, enhancing legitimacy from the ground up. The seceded, independent states might, under certain conditions, restart the self-enforcing exchange, and thus bring additional groups of people under such a state's rule, which is actually capable of providing them human rights, for example.

In contrast, when it comes to the regime of international law, which is undoubtedly useful for regulating the relations of consenting states, the implications of the results of this thesis are equally profound. The regime, as it stands, is unfit for providing a just world order. In a fairer world, the IL regime would need to acknowledge that its legitimacy stems from states and that state legitimacy, in turn, is grounded in their monopoly on violence, and little else.¹⁰⁹

The first step in a more just direction would be to revert to a global practice of state recognition that aligns with declaratory theories of state birth, instead of the current practice that aligns with constitutive theories. Although thoroughly utopian, the second step would be to establish rights of self-determination, allowing any group of people to hold a referendum on becoming an independent state.

This would at least apply pressure on the leaders of existing states to try and accommodate their populations, as aspirations appear to stem, or at least catch wind, from material grievances. Consequently, this would lead to the extensive apparatuses of IL granting self-determination aspirant peoples the blessings of a righteous cause, thereby diminishing the excuse of "lawfulness" of existing ineffective states. Even that would be better than the current apologetic practice of choosing not to take a stance.

In the end, what this thesis has demonstrated is that the struggle over statehood continues to be governed by the same material logics that forged states in the first place. International law, with its selective invocation of norms and its blind spots around power, cannot resolve the contradictions it helped entrench. Post-Bellicist Secession Theory offers a way out by grounding its explanation in the grand theory of state birth – exposing the assumptions underpinning contemporary international relations paradigms and the international legal regime, and cutting through them.

¹⁰⁹ It is, of course, unlikely that any practitioners or policymakers, as it stands, would go so grossly against their interests. The change would have to come from the ground up with the realisation of the power of bargaining.

8 Final Remarks

The underlying purpose of this thesis was to dismantle the dishonest moral foundations of the international state system and to demonstrate the value of replacing them with a historically grounded, materially honest understanding of statehood as the basis for scientific inquiry. To this end, the thesis pondered upon the role of international law in constructing an illusion of legitimacy around existing states. This *de jure* legitimacy is paradoxical, resting on a fundamental contradiction at the heart of international law itself.

The overview of the international legal regime reveals its inability to facilitate change, treating the status quo as fixed. Rather than offering a legal framework for sovereignty shifts, it defers to political processes, placing self-determination and secession in a legal grey zone.

Secessionist movements must first gain recognition from their parent state – an implicit veto that entrenches existing borders. This sovereignty-first logic rests on the assumption that all states respect rights and democratic processes internally, ignoring cases where self-determination is blocked or where smaller, more accountable entities might better serve populations.

While the critique of international law revealed the façade of legitimacy, the core intention of this thesis lay in advancing a Post-Bellicist framework to expose the material injustices underpinning the state system. Chowdhury's (2018) framework of Post-Bellicism was applied to the study of secession – a phenomenon that sits at the intersection of international law, state theory, and international relations. Crucially, secession is particularly threatening to the legitimacy of the contemporary state system, which implicitly constructs itself as perpetual.

The theoretical research question – *How can Post-Bellicism explain secession?* – was addressed through the development of Post-Bellicist Secession Theory (PBST). This mid-level theory explains the emergence of secessionist movements from a materialist Post-Bellicist perspective, while incorporating insights from Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities* to account for the particular forms these movements take. PBST then applies state logic to explain how a rational state – that being one which seeks to maximise its extraction – responds to secessionist aspirations. The plausibility of this explanatory model was explored in the first empirical research question and found to be credible. PBST was further extended to cover the point at which a secessionist “attempt” occurs, shifting analytical focus to the

reactions of both the parent state and external actors, with the assumption of their rationality. This second mechanism was plausibility-tested in the second empirical research question, with the results also supporting its credibility, albeit with minor qualifications.

Post-Bellicism's utility as a more general theory of political science and international relations was thus affirmed, with PBST demonstrating this utility by extending the framework into areas that have received less attention – namely, the logic of state-unravelling. While this thesis offers only a plausibility probe, further rigorous theory testing is necessary to consolidate PBST and, in doing so, to expand the broader utility of Post-Bellicism.

In the end, the thesis succeeds in grounding the study of a complex, cross-cutting phenomenon in a materially grounded framework and translating it into a workable research design, cutting through the ideological noise that typically surrounds the subject.

Bibliography

- Abi-Saab, G. (2006) 'Conclusion', in Kohen, M.G. (ed.) *Secession: International Law Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 470–476.
- African Union Commission (2011) *The African Union applauds the success of the referendum in Southern Sudan*. [press release] 8 February 2011. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/24178-pr-pr_no_en_8_february_2011_cpauc_the_african_union_applauds_the_success_of_the_referendum_in_southern_sudan.pdf (Accessed 17 April 2025).
- Akturk, A. S. (2016) 'Review of *The Kurds: A Modern History* by Michael M. Gunter', *Middle East Policy*, 23(3), pp. 152–156.
- Anderson, B. (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism*. Rev. edn. London: Verso.
- Anghie, A. (2005) *Imperialism, Sovereignty And The Making Of International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Atlantic Council (2024) *Kurdistan Iraq 2024 Budget: Not What it Appears at First Sight*. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/kurdistan-iraq-2024-budget-not-what-it-appears-when-it-first-meets-the-eye> (Accessed 8 April 2025).
- BBC News (2014) *Scotland Decides – Results*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/scotland-decides/results> (Accessed 9 April 2025).
- BBC News (2017) *Catalonia crisis in 300 words*. BBC News, 30 October. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41584864> (Accessed 5 April 2025).
- Castañeda, E. & Schneider, C. (2017) Introduction. In E. Castañeda & C. Schneider (eds.), *Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change: A Charles Tilly Reader* (pp. 1–22). Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205021>
- Castañeda, E. & Schneider, C. (eds.) (2017) *Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change: A Charles Tilly Reader*, 1st edn, Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205021>
- Castells, A. (2014) *The Fiscal and Monetary Impact of the Independence of Catalonia*. Working Paper 766, Barcelona Graduate School of Economics. Available at: <https://bw.bse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/766-file.pdf> (Accessed 6 April 2025).
- Catalan News (2019) *Catalonia's net contribution to Spanish redistributive fiscal system up to 5% of its GDP*. Catalan News, 18 July. Available at: <https://www.catalannews.com/business/item/catalonia-s-net-contribution-to-spanish-redistributive-fiscal-system-up-to-5-of-its-gdp> (Accessed 6 April 2025).
- CEPA (2022) 'Give me your poor: Russia's mercenary foot soldiers', *Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)*, October. Available at: <https://cepa.org/article/give-me-your-poor-russias-mercenary-foot-soldiers/> (Accessed 3 December 2024).

- Cetrà, D. and Harvey, M. (2019) 'Explaining the shift to pro-independence in Catalonia: Political frustration and the erosion of unionist hegemony.' *Ethnopolitics*, 18(2), pp. 166–188.
- Chimni, B.S. (2006) 'Third World Approaches to International Law: A manifesto', *International Community Law Review*, 8(1), pp. 3–27.
- Chowdhury, A. (2018) *The Myth of International Order: Why Weak States Persist and Alternatives to the State Fade Away*. 1st edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Council of the European Union (2024) *Think Tank reports on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine*. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/think-tank-reports-on-russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine/> (Accessed 24 January 2025).
- Council on Foreign Relations (2024) *U.S. Aid to Israel in Four Charts*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts> (Accessed 29 January 2025).
- CountryEconomy (n.d.a) *Iraq - GDP per capita*. Available at: <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/iraq> (Accessed 8 April 2025).
- CountryEconomy (n.d.b) *GDP - Catalonia - Spain Autonomous Communities*. Available at: <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/spain-autonomous-communities/catalonia> (Accessed 6 April 2025).
- Countryeconomy (n.d.c) *Spain GDP - Gross Domestic Product*. Available at: <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/spain> (Accessed 6 April 2025).
- CountryEconomy (n.d.d) *Sudan – GDP per capita*. Available at: <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/sudan> (Accessed 8 April 2025).
- CountryEconomy (n.d.e) *South Sudan – GDP per capita*. Available at: <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/south-sudan> (Accessed 8 April 2025).
- Crawford, J. (2006) *The Creation of States in International Law*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dick, P.K. (1978) 'How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later'. In *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon*. New York: Doubleday.
- DW (2017) *Catalonia referendum violence prompts European reaction*. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/catalonia-referendum-violence-prompts-european-reaction/a-40772750> (Accessed 15 April 2025).
- Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2006–2023) – processed by Our World in Data, 'Civil liberties index' [dataset]. Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2021: The China challenge*, *Democracy Index 2022: Frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine*, *Democracy Index 2023: Age of Conflict*; Gapminder, *Democracy Index v4* [original data]. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/civil-liberties-index-eiu> (Accessed 3 March 2025).
- EGRIS (2023) *International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS)*. Available at: https://egrisststats.org/wp-content/uploads/International_Recommendations_on_Statelessness_Statistics_Jan_2023_final.pdf (Accessed 17 April 2025).

EIA (2021) *Iraq Background*. Available at:

https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Iraq/background.htm (Accessed 8 April 2025).

ElectionGuide (2011) *South Sudan: Referendum, January 9, 2011*. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Available at: <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/146/> (Accessed 10 April 2025).

Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan in Uganda (n.d.) *Culture & people*. Available at: <https://southsudanembassyuganda.com/south-sudan/culture-people> (Accessed 10 April 2025).

Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.a) *Sudan*. Available at:

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudan> (Accessed 10 April 2025).

Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.b) *South Sudan*. Available at:

<https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Sudan> (Accessed 10 April 2025).

European Union Election Observation Mission (2011) *Southern Sudan Referendum 9–15 January 2011: Final Report*. [pdf] Available at:

https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/eueom/pdf/missions/final-report-eueom-referendum-south-sudan-2011_en.pdf (Accessed 10 April 2025).

Folktinget (2006) *Identitet och framtid: Folktingets undersökning om finlandssvenskarnas identitet hösten 2005*. [PDF]. Available at:

https://folktinget2.webbhuset.fi/Site/Data/1597/Files/Folktinget_low.pdf (Accessed 22 April 2025).

Freedom House (2025) *Freedom in the World 2025: Global Freedom Status*. Available at:

<https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map?type=fiw&year=2025> (Accessed 3 March 2025).

Garrett, L. (2007) 'The Challenge of Global Health', *Foreign Affairs*, 86(1), pp. 14–38.

Gathii, J.T. (2011) 'TWAIL: A brief history of its origins, its decentralized network, and a tentative bibliography', *Trade, Law and Development*, 3(1), pp. 26–64.

Generalitat de Catalunya (2017) *El Govern trasllada els resultats definitius del referèndum de l'1 d'octubre al Parlament de Catalunya*. Available at:

https://web.archive.org/web/20171006212613/http://www.govern.cat/pres_gov/govern/ca/monografics/303541/govern-trasllada-resultats-definitius-referendum-l1-doctubre-parlament-catalunya.html (Accessed 15 April 2025).

George, A.L. and Bennett, A. (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ghais, S. (2019) 'Consequences of excluding armed groups from peace negotiations: Chad and the Philippines', *International Negotiation*, 24(1), pp. 61–90.

Gidron, Y. (2018) "'One People, One Struggle": Anya-Nya propaganda and the Israeli Mossad in Southern Sudan, 1969–1971', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 12(3), pp. 428–453. doi: 10.1080/17531055.2018.1480103.

Goodwin, J. (2001) *No Other Way Out: States And Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*. Cambridge University Press.

- Google Finance, (n.d.) *IQD to USD: Iraqi Dinar to US Dollar exchange rate*. Available at: <https://www.google.com/finance/quote/IQD-USD> (Accessed 7 April 2025).
- Grasmeder, E.M.F. (2021) Leaning on legionnaires: Why modern states recruit foreign soldiers. *International Security*, 46(1), pp.147–195. doi:10.1162/isec_a_00411.
- Griffiths, R.D. (2016) *Age of Secession: The International and Domestic Determinants of State Birth*. Cambridge University Press.
- Griffiths, R.D. (2021) *Secession and the Sovereignty Game: Strategy and Tactics for Aspiring Nations*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Guibernau, M. (2013) 'Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy', *Ethnopolitics*, 12(4), pp. 368–393.
- Härtull, C. and Saarela, J. (2024) *Earnings mobility across three generations of natives in Finland: A comparison of Finnish and Swedish speakers*. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 94, Article 100990. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2024.100990>
- Haspeslagh, S. (2022) 'Proscribing peace: How listing armed groups as terrorists hurts negotiations', *International Affairs*, 98(5), pp. 1802–1821.
- Hernández, G. (2022) *International Law* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Hobbes, T. ([1651] 1996) *Leviathan*. Edited by R. Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hui, V.T.-B. (2004) *War and state formation in ancient China and early modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hui, V.T.-B. (2016) How Tilly's state-formation paradigm is revolutionizing the study of Chinese state-making. In: C. Kaspersen and B. Strandsbjerg, eds. *Does war make states? Investigations of Charles Tilly's historical sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.177–204.
- Human Rights Watch (2003) *Sudan, Oil and Human Rights*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- IDESCAT (2017) *Population. Catalonia*. Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya. Available at: <https://www.idescat.cat/indicadors/?id=aec&n=152> (Accessed 6 April 2025).
- IDESCAT (2023) *Use of Catalan and Spanish in Catalonia*. Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya. Available at: <https://www.idescat.cat/novetats/?id=5138&lang=en> (Accessed 6 April 2025).
- IGAD Secretariat on Peace in the Sudan (2002) *Machakos Protocol*, 20 July. PDF available via Small Arms Survey HSBA Docs: <https://tinyurl.com/machakos-2-5> (Accessed 17 April 2025).
- Independent (2017) *Scotland would have to 'join the queue' to rejoin EU after independence, says EU source*, *The Independent*, 13 March. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/scottish-eu-independence-referendum-scotland-join-queue-membership-apply-a7627201.html> (Accessed 15 April 2025).
- Institut Kurde de Paris (n.d.) *The Kurdish Population*. Available at: <https://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/the-kurdish-population-1232551004> (Accessed 6 April 2025).

International IDEA (2020) *The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology: Conceptualization and Measurement Framework, Version 4*. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/sites/default/files/inline-files/global-state-of-democracy-indices-methodology-v4.pdf> (Accessed 3 March 2025).

International Rescue Committee (2025) *Crisis in South Sudan: What you need to know and how to help*. Available at: <https://www.rescue.org/eu/article/crisis-south-sudan-what-you-need-know-and-how-help> (Accessed 10 April 2025).

Jay, S., Batruch, A., Jetten, J., McGarty, C. and Muldoon, O.T. (2019) 'Economic inequality and the rise of far-right populism: A social psychological analysis', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 29(5), pp. 418–428. doi:10.1002/casp.2409.

Keating, M. (1996) *Nations Against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Keohane, R. O. (1984) *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kielilakikomitea (2000) Kansalliskielten historiallinen, kulttuurinen ja sosiologinen tausta. [pdf] Helsinki: Oikeusministeriö. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20110927171142/http://www.om.fi/uploads/zye6d9qeom5.pdf> (Accessed 11 April 2025).

Kirby, D. (2006) *A Concise History of Finland*. Cambridge University Press.

Kohen, M.G. (2006) *Secession: International Law Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.

Koskenniemi, M. (2005) *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument*. Cambridge University Press.

Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (2022) *Measuring the GDP of Kurdistan Region and Iraq for the Year 2018*. [pdf] Erbil: KRSO. Available at: <https://krso.gov.krd/content/upload/1/root/measuring-the-gdp-of-kurdistan-region-and-iraq-for-the-year-2018-was-carried-out-press-release.pdf> (Accessed 7 April 2025).

Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (n.d) *Map*. Available at: <https://krso.gov.krd/en/map> (Accessed 9 April 2025).

Lake, D.A. & Powell, R. (eds.) (1999) *Strategic Choice and International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Locke, J. (1988 [1689]) *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by P. Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lyall, J. and Wilson, I. (2009) Rage against the machines: Explaining outcomes in counterinsurgency wars. *International Organization*, 63(1), pp.67–106.

Marx, K. (1990 [1867]) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I*. Translated by B. Fowkes. Introduction by E. Mandel. London: Penguin Books.

McDowall, D. (2004) *A Modern History of the Kurds*. 3rd edn. London: I.B. Tauris.

Merton, R.K. (1968) 'On sociological theories of the middle range', in *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Enlarged edition. New York: Free Press, pp. 39–72.

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (n.d.) *The special status of the Åland Islands*. Available at: <https://um.fi/the-special-status-of-the-aland-islands> (Accessed 11 April 2025).

Mitchell, J. (2009) *Devolution in the UK*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933) *Adopted at the Seventh International Conference of American States, Montevideo, 26 December 1933*. Available at: <https://www.ilsa.org/Jessup/Jessup15/Montevideo%20Convention.pdf> (Accessed 4 February 2025).

Natali, D. (2010) *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Office for National Statistics (2022) *Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2021*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2021> (Accessed 9 April 2025).

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2024) UN Special Committee finds Israel's warfare methods in Gaza consistent with genocide, OHCHR, 14 November, Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/un-special-committee-finds-israels-warfare-methods-gaza-consistent-genocide> (Accessed 24 January 2025).

Our World in Data (n.d.) *Foreign aid received, 2023 (net, constant 2022 US\$)*. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/foreign-aid-received-net> (Accessed 6 March 2025).

Özkirimli, U. (2017) *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*. 3rd edn. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pavković, A. (2015) *Secession: A much contested concept*. Unpublished manuscript. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270275527> (Accessed 18 March 2025).

Petrasek, D. (2005) 'Armed groups and peace processes: Pondering and planning engagement', *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue*. Available at: <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Armedgroupsandpeaceprocesses-ponderingandplanningengagement-November-2005.pdf> (Accessed 15 February 2025).

Piketty, T. (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Translated by A. Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rousseau, J.-J. (1997 [1762]) *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Edited by V. Gourevitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rudaw (2024) *Iraqi federal court ruling deals another blow to Kurdistan Region's oil autonomy*. Available at: <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/220220251> (Accessed 8 April 2025).

S&P Global (2024) *Iraq's Budget and Kurdish Oil*. Available at: <https://www.spglobal.com/commodity-insights/en/news-research/latest-news/crude-oil/022224-iraqi-federal-court-ruling-deals-another-blow-to-kurdistan-regional-governments-oil-autonomy> (Accessed 8 April 2025).

- Scotfact (n.d.) *GDP per Head Comparison*. Available at: https://www.scotfact.com/GDP_Comp_Per_Head (Accessed 9 April 2025).
- Scottish Government (2015) *Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 2013–14*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/government-expenditure-revenue-scotland-2013-14/> (Accessed 9 April 2025).
- Shinn, D.H. (2004) *Addis Ababa Agreement: Was it destined to fail and are there lessons for the current Sudan peace process?* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 20(1), pp.239–259. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250258620_Addis_Ababa_Agreement_was_it_destined_to_fail_and_are_there_lessons_for_the_Current_Sudan_Peace_Process (Accessed 10 April 2025).
- Shoemaker, P. J., Tankard, J. and Lasorsa, D. L. (2004) *How to Build Social Science Theories*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412990110>
- Smith, A.D. (1998) *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Spruyt, H. (1996) *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stansfield, G. (2003) *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Statista (2022) 'Where Russia's Attack on Ukraine Was Condemned'. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/chart/26946/stance-on-ukraine-invasion/> (Accessed 29 January 2025).
- Statista (2024) 'Gross domestic product of the United Kingdom from 1948 to 2024', *Statista*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/281744/gdp-of-the-united-kingdom/> (Accessed 9 April 2025).
- Steinmo, S. (2008) 'Historical institutionalism', in D. Della Porta and M. Keating (eds.) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 118–138.
- Stilz, A. (2017) *The Theory of Self-Determination*, Fernando R. Tesón, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 256 pp., \$110 cloth, \$34.99 paper. *Ethics & International Affairs* 31 (4) p.521–523.
- Sudan Tribune (2011) *FACTBOX: South Sudan receives international recognition*. 9 July. Available at: <https://sudantribune.com/article39041/> (Accessed 17 April 2025).
- The Economist (2022) 'Where are Russia's newest soldiers coming from?', *The Economist*, 21 October. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2022/10/21/where-are-russias-newest-soldiers-coming-from> (Accessed 3 December 2024).
- The Global Economy (n.d.) *Economic indicators by country*. Available at: <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com> (Accessed 6 March 2025).
- The Guardian (2025) *The Guardian view on South Sudan: the world's youngest nation is on the brink of a new conflict*. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/apr/01/the-guardian-view-on-south-sudan-the-worlds-youngest-nation-is-on-the-brink-of-a-new-conflict> (Accessed 10 April 2025).

The Moscow Times (2022) 'Poorer Russian regions conscripting more soldiers, investigation says', *The Moscow Times*, 6 October. Available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/10/06/poorer-russian-regions-conscripting-more-soldiers-investigation-says-a79002> (Accessed 3 December 2024).

The New York Times (2024a) 'Russian oil price cap shadow fleet'. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/14/us/politics/russian-oil-price-cap-shadow-fleet.html> (Accessed 29 January 2025)

The New York Times (2024b) 'After two years of bloody fighting, Ukraine wrestles with conscription challenges', *The New York Times*, 28 January. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/world/europe/ukraine-conscription-mobilization-bill.html> (Accessed 3 December 2024).

Tilly, C. (2017a) 'War making and state making as organized crime', in E. Castañeda & C. Schneider (eds.), *Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change: A Charles Tilly Reader*, 1st edn, Routledge, pp. 123-139. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205021>

Tilly, C. (2017b) 'Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990', in E. Castañeda & C. Schneider (eds.), *Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change: A Charles Tilly Reader*, 1st edn, Routledge, pp. 140-154. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205021>

Transparency International (2024) *How CPI Scores are Calculated*. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/how-cpi-scores-are-calculated> (Accessed 7 March 2025).

Transparency International (2025) *Corruption Perceptions Index 2024*. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024> (Accessed 7 March 2025).

U.S. Department of State. (2000) 'Sudan', in *1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State. Available at: https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/sudan.html (Accessed 17 April 2025).

U.S. Congress (2002) *Sudan Peace Act*. Public Law 107-245, 21 October. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-107publ245/html/PLAW-107publ245.htm> (Accessed 17 April 2025).

U.S. Department of State (2000) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 1999: Sudan*. Washington, DC. Available at: https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/sudan.html (Accessed 17 April 2025).

U.S. Department of State (2005) 'Chronology of U.S. Engagement in the Sudan Peace Process.' Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesman, Nairobi, Kenya, 8 January. Available at: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/40459.htm> (Accessed 17 April 2025).

UK Parliament Constitution Committee (2012) *Referendum on Scottish Independence*.

Available at:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201012/ldselect/ldconst/263/26303.htm> (Accessed 9 April 2025).

UN Security Council (2006) *Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan Stands Firm, but More International Support Needed, Security Council Told*. Press Release SC/8607, 13 January.

New York: United Nations. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2006/sc8607.doc.htm> (Accessed 17 April 2025).

United Nations (1945) *Charter of the United Nations*. Article 1(2). Available at:

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text> (Accessed 1 December 2024).

United Nations (2023) *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Progress Chart*.

Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/progress-chart/Progress-Chart-2023.pdf> (Accessed 24 January 2025).

United Nations Environment Programme (2024) *Emissions Gap Report 2024: Turning Up the Heat*. Available at: <https://www.unep.org/emissions-gap-report-2024> (Accessed 24 January 2025).

United Nations High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004) *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*. United Nations. Available at:

https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/59/565 (Accessed 15 February 2025).

Vincze, L. & Henning-Lindblom, A. (2016) Swedish, Finnish and bilingual? Multiple ethnolinguistic identities in relation to ethnolinguistic vitality in Finland. *The international journal of bilingualism : cross-disciplinary, cross-linguistic studies of language behavior*. 20 (4), 488–498.

Voronoï (2024) *Global Crude Oil Production (2023)*. Available at:

<https://www.voronoïapp.com/energy/-Global-Crude-Oil-Production-2023-2014> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Waltz, K. N. (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Weber, M. (1946) *Politics as a Vocation*. In: H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 77-128.

Weber, M. et al. (2009 [1919]) *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*. 1st ed. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge.

Wendt, A. (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitfield, T. (2014) *Endgame for ETA: elusive peace in the Basque Country*. 1st ed. New York, New York: Oxford University Press.

Wikimedia Commons (2023) *File: E.U-Catalonia.png*. Available at:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:E.U-Catalonia.png&oldid=831612258> (Accessed 6 April 2025).

Wikimedia Commons (2023) *Kurdish-inhabited areas (orthographic projection with inset)*. Available at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurdish-inhabited_areas_\(orthographic_projection_with_inset\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurdish-inhabited_areas_(orthographic_projection_with_inset).svg) (Accessed 6 April 2025).

Wikimedia Commons (2025) *Scotland in the UK and Europe.svg*. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Scotland_in_the_UK_and_Europe.svg&oldid=1017655615 (Accessed 9 April 2025).

Wikipedia contributors. (n.d.) *Location South Sudan AU Africa.svg* [online image]. Wikimedia Commons. Available at: https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etel%C3%A4-Sudan#/media/Tiedosto:Location_South_Sudan_AU_Africa.svg (Accessed 10 April 2025) (Image modified by author).

World Bank (2019) *Population, total – Sudan*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SD> (Accessed 10 April 2025).

World Bank (2021) *A Changing Landscape: Trends in Official Financial Flows and the Aid Architecture*. Available at: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/9eb18daf0e574a0f106a6c74d7a1439e-0060012021/original/A-Changing-Landscape-Trends-in-Official-Financial-Flows-and-the-Aid-Architecture-November-2021.pdf> (Accessed 6 March 2025).

World Bank (n.d.) *Military expenditure (% of GDP)*. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=2023&most_recent_value_desc=true&start=1960&view=chart (Accessed 6 March 2025).