

**Advancing the Cause:  
Theory and Assessment of Third Party Recognition of Separatist Movements**

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**Abstract**

The successful progression of separatist and self-determination movements from pseudo-statehood to eligibility for international recognition is a poorly understood process. Two disjoint literatures, one on partially recognized states and one on diplomatic recognition, speak to the topic, but neither has been focused much on how these states accrue international sovereignty en route to recognition. Official recognition, the dominant measure, reflects only the final stages of a long process. Before officially recognizing aspiring states, third parties tacitly recognize them by other important means: foreign aid, military partnerships, and other forms. To fill in this gap, I create a latent variable model of third-party recognition, using data on military and economic aid, diplomatic exchange, IGO voting, sanctions, opposition to and support of governments facing separatists, and official recognition. With this new measure, I test several theoretical predictions about recognition, finding: (1) that major powers move towards recognition of separatist groups when other powers stake out positions, (2) that extant violence in separatist conflicts has a direct positive effect on movement towards recognition, (3) that states move away from recognition when they share security interests with the party standing to lose territory, and (4) that successful seizure and control of territory by separatists has no effect on movement towards international recognition.

The United States government trains Kurdish soldiers (Tomson 2017). It provides aid to the Kurdish military (McCleary 2017), and it consults the Kurdish Regional Government on its engagements in the region (Cook 2016). The US funds nonmilitary aid projects in Kurdish territory (KRG 2012), and hosts the Kurdish president when he visits (White House Archives 2005). Many other states have similar engagements with Kurdish authorities, and similar channels of reception of Kurdish interests, even establishing consulates in the Kurdish capital of Erbil (Caryl 2015). Still, despite a relatively thorough and long running relationship with Kurdish authorities, the US' official position, and that of every other state, is that there is no sovereign Kurdistan.

The Kurdish case demonstrates how exceedingly difficult and rare is the successful emergence of a new state in the modern era. It exemplifies the numerous, diverse challenges awaiting would-be movements for self-determination. Scholars have striven to understand these problems at nearly every step of the process: the origins of and formation of nationalist movements (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991); the justification of separatist claims (Wellman 2010, 2005, Philpott 2001, 1998, Buchanan 1998, 1991; Moore 2010); the difficulties of weakening the existing governments' claims on a territory and establishing support for separation or secession (Toft 2003; Kolstø 2006; Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007; Roeder 2007; James and Lutz 2001; Hale 2008; Siroky 2009; Carment and James 1995; Carter and Goemans 2011; Cunningham 2011); and the complications of building a case for international sovereignty (Krasner 1999; Fabry 2010; Coggins 2011, 2014; Sterio 2013; Closson 2011; Geldenhuys 2009; Biswas and Nair 2010; Buzard, Graham, and Horne 2014).

This last branch of research, on the recognition phase of self-determination movements, has been disjoint. Some have examined the circumstances under which groups aspiring to

statehood have managed to secure the final passage into the club (Krasner 1999; Coggins 2014; Griffiths 2016). Others have focused on other kinds of states, de facto and de jure states, failed and pseudo-states, in which international status does not reflect how politics operates on the ground (Ramos 2013; Closson 2011; Caspersen 2011; Harvey and Stansfield 2011). It has been common to distinguish degrees of sovereignty by focusing on official acts of recognition as the primary indicator of international sovereignty. The many other relations between these groups and third-party states have not been treated as part of the sovereignty puzzle, and there have been few attempts to connect the different stages a movement goes through as it progresses towards recognized statehood. Diplomatic recognition of a new state has been treated as a separate and distinct phenomenon from human rights concerns over, trade with, and aid to self-identified autonomous non-state groups. Diplomatic recognition, it would seem, is the only meaningful measure of an aspiring state's international sovereignty.

In this paper, I argue that this is an ill-conceived treatment of sovereignty. I propose a unifying framework, arguing that a government's decision to classify a separatist group as terrorist, take a neutral stance, engage in trade or military cooperation, or officially recognize a new state might all be conceived as actions correlated with underlying support for statehood. Conceptualizing international sovereignty this way solves several problems. The first advantage is that it makes for a natural connection between the two literatures mentioned above. Third parties to these conflicts make important diplomatic, military, and economic decisions that can indicate favorable (or unfavorable) stances towards each aspiring state, contribute to the process of increasing (or decreasing) aspiring states' "eligibility" for diplomatic recognition, or both. Second, international sovereignty has generally been conceived as a characteristic that moves in only one direction, accruing but not diminishing. This principle is even enshrined in international

law. However, in practice, it moves both directions, and while official recognition is rarely revoked, there is little reason to believe third parties' views of separatist groups only increase in favorability. Finally, it complements official diplomatic decisions to recognize, which only capture movement on the far end of what will be conceived in this paper as a continuum.

I proceed as follows. First, I lay out the case for a new conceptualization of international recognition (or alternatively, international sovereignty), outlining the theoretical advantages of thinking about it as a continuous process, rather than a discrete foreign policy decision. Then, I describe the data and walk through the process used to estimate the latent variable model for implicit support for recognition. I choose a few separatist and a few third-party cases to demonstrate the performance of the model through the period in question. Finally, I revisit some key questions that have thus far been explored only through examining diplomatic recognition. With this model, I find support for several hypotheses and empirical findings derived from prior literature.

### **The Continuum of International Sovereignty**

The triadic nature of the context is confusing, so it is useful to clearly define the three kinds of actors in question. I define them as: (1) the holding state—that is, the state that controls the territory in question; (2) the aspiring state—the separatist, secessionist, or self-determination movement that seeks to wrest control of the territory and establish a new, independent state; and (3) the third-party state—every other state that is capable of holding a position vis-à-vis either or both of these states. To name one example, in the China-Tibet dispute, China is the holding state, Tibet is the aspiring state, and every other country is a third party.

International recognition of states has emerged as an important issue in recent work in IR, in part due to the increasing prevalence of substate groups asserting claims of self-determination. On top of Krasner's classic conceptualization of international sovereignty as a state of organized hypocrisy (1999), the last few years have seen some excellent works demonstrating the role large and influential states play in the process a new state goes through to become recognized and join the system officially (Sterio 2013; Coggins 2014; Griffiths 2016). Coggins (2011; 2014) takes official recognition and final entry into the state system as her dependent variables of interest, studying the conditions under which the major powers extend official recognition to new states. She tests the effect of official great power recognition on final entry and finds that the most influential states have de facto control over who are the official members of the state system. Additionally, these works share Krasner's argument that states officially recognize such groups when it benefits them materially or diplomatically.

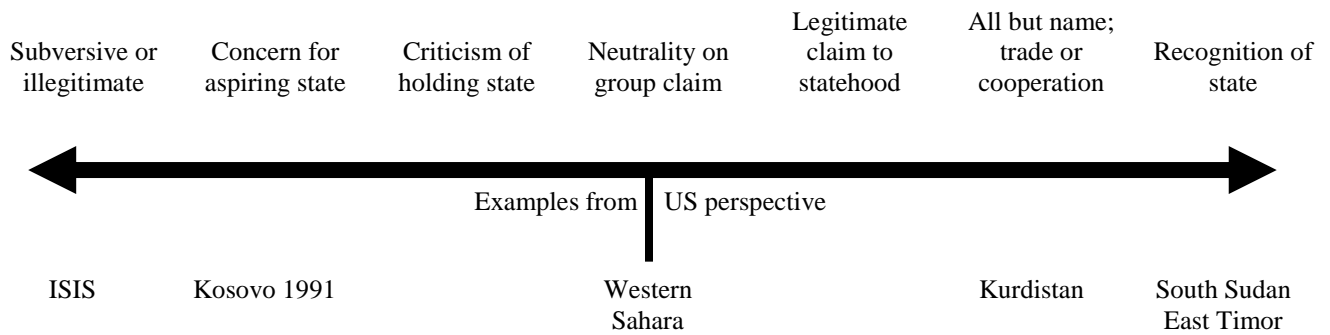
However, the theoretical and empirical decisions of these works have restricted the universe of considerable cases substantially. Official recognition is only one costly policy position that third-party states take; it necessarily entails escalating opposition to the claim of the holding state, which may be ally or enemy, and is already a universally recognized member of the system. Furthermore, only some movements become eligible for recognition, and there are other foreign policy decisions states may take that advance the cause of an aspiring state. That is to say, official recognition might be characterized as the last domino to fall in the process of the emergence of new states, but many other activities come beforehand. Additionally, smaller, less influential states may make very different decisions regarding these movements than major powers do.

The discussion has also been restricted in terms of direction; changes of state position in relation to these groups has generally been characterized as moving in one direction, towards recognition. A classic example proves helpful. In 1933, officials from 19 western hemisphere states, including the US, Mexico, and Brazil, convened in Montevideo, drafted, and signed a document outlining the “rights and duties of states.” At one point, it asserted, “The recognition of a state merely signifies that the state which recognizes it accepts the personality of the other with all the rights and duties determined by international law. Recognition is unconditional and irrevocable” (1933). This idea of movement towards recognition as happening in only one direction is seldom pointed out, but often implied. However, official recognition is sometimes revoked, as are decisions to legitimate the positions of groups seeking independence, autonomy, or self-government. Recognition might therefore be better defined as something both continuous and bi-directional. Third-party states make minor changes in their positions short of recognition, and they may also reverse those changes.

To augment the concept formation regarding recognition of movements as new states, I conceptualize third-party states as moving along a continuum of favorability towards self-determination movements. At the far left of the continuum, a third party considers a movement for self-determination to be subversive to the ruling government and illegitimate internationally, perhaps granting them the label “terrorist” or “rebellion.” At the far right of the spectrum lies recognition of the movement as a legitimate member of the international system, a member of the club of 195 countries with near universal recognition as self-governing. Between the two ends exist multiple positions a third-party state may take regarding a self-determination movement, as well as those towards the ruling government against which separatists stake their

claims. Figure 1 illustrates a rough order of the positions third-party states may take towards aspiring states.

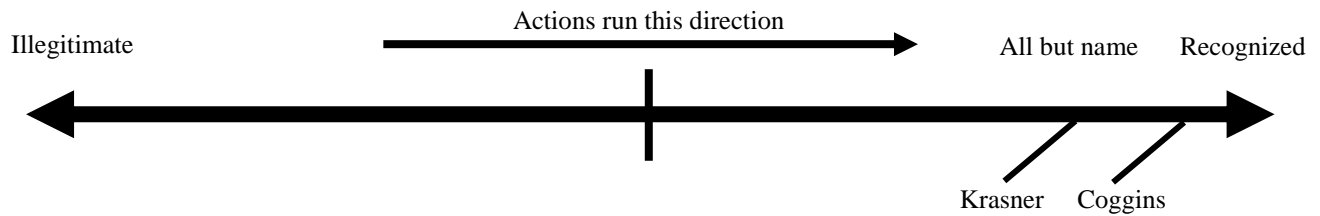
**Figure 1: The Sovereignty Continuum for Aspiring States**



The positions that third-party states can take regarding separatist groups fall along this continuum, and changing positions can be characterized as movements back and forth. For the purposes of this paper, only the two ends of the spectrum and the central point might be considered settled, though I have tried to organize these positions with an intuitive order to examples of degrees. Still, it is possible to describe cases with a different order.

This continuum of international sovereignty makes it easier to position the scope of the rest of this paper in the context of prior work on recognition. For example, I start by placing the ideas of Krasner (1999) and Coggins (2014) clearly on the spectrum. This is seen in Figure 2. Both works focus on the activity on the far right of the spectrum, asking what conditions are necessary to enable final entry into the state system. By illustrating their positions in this way, it becomes clear that the scope of their answers is somewhat limited.

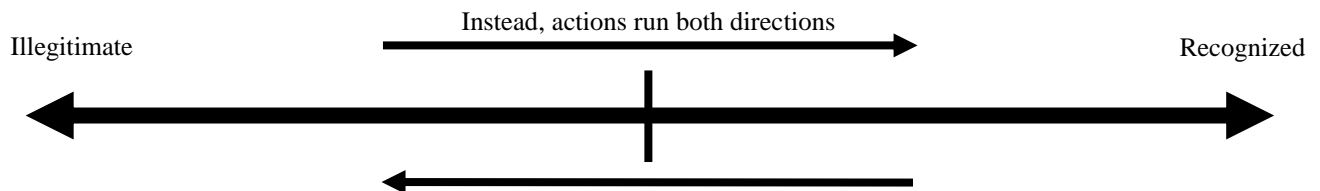
**Figure 2: Location of Current Research**



A stark implication of conceiving of international sovereignty in this way is that it places currently recognized states and separatist groups on equal footing (if different points along the spectrum), at least in the eyes of third-party recognizers. Since an established state is simply the right end of continuum of possible statuses a group can take on, it differs only in its *relative* position. That position has some very real privileges at the international level—Fazal and Griffiths (2014) point to IGO membership, improved international security, and financial benefits—and recognizing states know successful movements will be qualified for those.

For state positions on this continuum to make sense, they must also be conceived of as bi-directional. With changing political circumstances, material needs, and opportunities, states move back and forth along this spectrum. The idea of recognition as something “irrevocable,” while intuitive, does not seem to work in the real international environment.

**Figure 3: A Bi-directional Continuum**

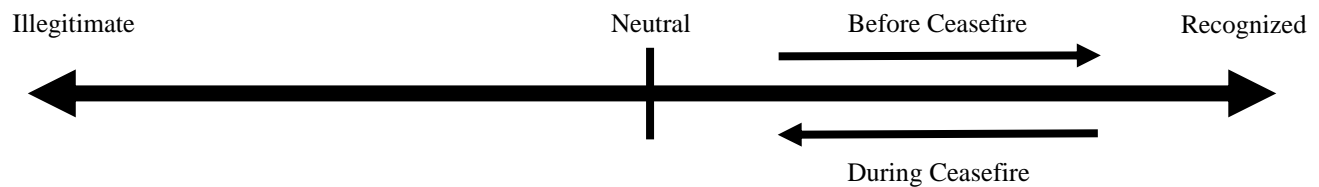


A useful example of this bi-directional nature is in the Western Saharan case. Figure 4 illustrates the position of the Western Saharan case on this continuum. The action all takes place



on the right half, since the ICJ decision effectively made neutrality the de facto minimum position third parties were willing to hold in this conflict. The arrows on the right illustrate the theory, that the occurrence or threat of mass violence persuades states to forego interest or disinterest and to involve themselves in the situation by acts of recognition of self-determination movements. Acts of recognition towards Western Saharan self-determination have taken two forms: the first is by recognizing the ICJ decision in 1975 and supporting UN efforts to implement its ruling, such as founding and empowering the Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in 1991; the second is by plainly and officially recognizing the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as the rightful government of the territory, thereby assuming the results of a properly held referendum would favor independence.

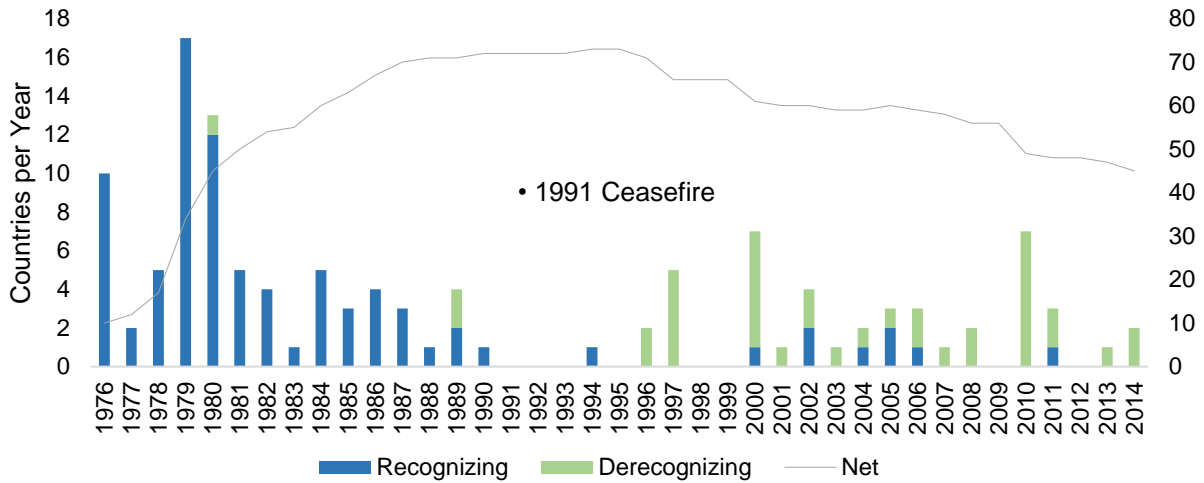
**Figure 4: Western Sahara and Recognition**



The years leading up to the 1991 ceasefire saw 75 sovereign nations extend recognition to an independent Western Sahara governed by the SADR (ARSO 2014). This included prominent governments like those of Mexico, India, Iran, and South Africa. Since the UN brokered the ceasefire in 1991, and since violence has waned and the conflict has lost significant international attention, the SADR has witnessed a bizarre and unfortunate trend internationally. While nine states have newly recognized the SADR, including the new states of East Timor and South Sudan (ARSO 2002; SPSRASD 2011), 33 states have withdrawn, frozen, or suspended

recognition (henceforth “derecognized”) of the SADR (ARSO 2014). This is illustrated in figure 5.

**Figure 5: Third Party Acts of Recognition and Derecognition**



Source: (ARSO 2014)

The Moroccan government has shrewdly applied pressure on states to derecognize the SADR. A US diplomat notes, “Getting other countries to recognize its sovereignty over Western Sahara, or to abstain from taking a position on Western Sahara, has been a dominant focus of Morocco's diplomatic efforts since 1975...Probably owing mostly to Moroccan diplomatic efforts, [33] countries which previously recognized the SADR withdrew their recognition and froze their relations with the SADR.” (Jackson 2009) The Moroccan government persuaded the Indian government to derecognize the SADR by leveraging India’s dependence on it for phosphates (Millard 2009). It did the same thing in Grenada (Grenadan Government 2010). In 2007, the Kenyan government found it to be “imperative” to suspend relations with the SADR in favor of those with Morocco for access to its “sizeable market” (Ranneberger 2007), which was not open to Kenya while it recognized the SADR. The government of Dominique agreed to derecognize the SADR as part of a deal that has Morocco funding a luxury hotel there (Guguen

2013). Morocco has also employed less economically based methods. It refused to deploy Moroccan troops as UN peace-keepers in Haiti in 2010 because the Haitian government recognizes the SADR (Kaplan 2010), and in 2008 it sent arms to the government of Comoros to resist putschists, thus pressuring the government of Seychelles to derecognize the SADR (Jackson 2009).

Its efforts have yielded fruit. Since the ceasefire in 1991 and during the thus far unproductive UN mission to hold a referendum, ten countries withdrew recognition in the 1990s, 14 in the 2000s, and nine more since 2010. States waffling specifically on diplomatic recognition demonstrates the bi-directional nature of international sovereignty. A model of sovereignty more sensitive to this kind of fluctuation across this continuum would both connect important parts of the literature and allow new questions to be explored. For example, do the modes of operation identified by prominent scholars on international sovereignty (Krasner 1999; Coggins 2011; Sterio 2013) apply to cases that are further to the left on the continuum? Second, do states make decisions in the same way if they are moving towards the left vis-à-vis current and aspiring states, delegitimizing their bases for claims of sovereignty?

### **Developing a New Measure**

If international recognition is a continuous dimension, it requires the development of a new, continuous measure. A good measure should include other elements of the complex relationship international actors often have with separatist movements in other countries, in addition to what may be the most important variable—official, diplomatic recognition. I conceptualize support for recognition as a latent trait, assuming there is an underlying characteristic of support for

recognition that cannot be measured directly, but which influences other measurable traits. Those observed outcomes are used to estimate and compare levels of this characteristic across countries and time periods, as well as develop and test ideas about changes in the theoretically important variable. In this case, I estimate a single “continuous recognition” latent variable using five international diplomatic indicators and two military indicators. To estimate this variable, I build on Bayesian item response theory (IRT) models, which have been used with models estimated through both dichotomous, ordinal, and continuous indicators (Schnakenberg and Fariss 2014; Treier and Jackman 2008; Quinn 2004; Reuning, Kenwick, and Fariss 2016).

Following the examples of Schnakenberg and Fariss (2014) and Reuning, Kenwick, and Fariss (2016), recognition is modeled through a dynamic item response theory (D-IRT) framework. IRT models were first developed to estimate student ability, an unobservable characteristic, based on answers to questions of various difficulty, observable responses correlated with student ability. In the model developed here, each manifest variable is analogous to a correct answer to a test question. In the testing environment, each question has a certain difficulty, with the assumption that a student’s ability to answer questions of higher difficulty implies an ability to answer less difficult questions. In a model of recognition, the analogue would be that some of the actions third-party states take are more difficult than others, and so fewer states take them.

This model does not require that you specify how important each variable is for estimating the latent trait. Neither does it assume equal weights for all variables, as some indices do. Rather, it uses the provided data—responses to test questions in the classical context, third-party decisions in this context—to estimate two qualities, or parameters. The first is the “difficulty” of an item; some questions are harder than others, and some foreign policy decisions

are rarer than others. Questions that are answered wrong more often, and rare favorable (to separatists) decisions, are considered more difficult. In other words, there are certain foreign policy decisions that happen more often; those would be classified as less difficult, and the estimated level of difficulty is informed by the data. The second is how well a variable “discriminates” among cases—harder questions should classify students of higher ability with greater accuracy, and tougher foreign policy decisions towards separatists are more informative of how much a state supports recognition.

The general idea behind the IRT model in this context is that it allows one to look at the behavior states exhibit in a set of foreign policy actions, taken to be correlated with a latent property, support for recognition. The model lets the provided data sort the third-party positions along the continuum based on how favorable their foreign policy activities are for the aspiring states or how unfavorable they are for holding states, in that year and in prior years.

Latent variable models also assume local independence among indicator variables; any relationships among variables within the model are due to variation of the latent variable, not to causal relationships between the indicator variables themselves. An example of this assumption in this project would be that a country’s intervention in another’s secessionist conflict cannot cause favorable votes in the UN; instead, the decision to intervene and the decision to vote for favorable measures both stem from an underlying trait of latent recognition of the separatist group. In essence, the variables are only correlated based on their shared relationship with the underlying measure and not because one variable causes another. A classic example would be that an answer to a question on a standardized test does not cause another answer. Rather, the scores on two questions are correlated because both capture ability, the unobservable characteristic.

**Table 1: Indicators for estimating continuous recognition**

Item	Explanation
<b>Diplomatic</b>	
UN Voting <sup>1</sup>	UN votes favoring separatist territory in any way
Recognition <sup>2</sup>	Official acts of recognition
Diplomatic exchange <sup>3</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> party visits with leaders in separatist territory
Sanctions <sup>4</sup>	Participation in sanctions against holding state or separatists
Foreign Aid <sup>5</sup>	Levels of foreign aid to holding state or separatists
<b>Military</b>	
Intervention <sup>6</sup>	Level and direction of intervention in conflict
Arms transfers <sup>7</sup>	Aid to holding state or separatists in form of arms

Table 1 displays the indicators used to estimate this model. These variables are chosen because: (1) they represent instances in which a third-party state can make unilateral decisions directly regarding these conflicts, (2) they require a state to recognize (in the unofficial sense) aspiring states entities with whom they can interact, (3) they advance the “eligibility” for official recognition of aspiring states. The data were derived from 10 sources. Six datasets were used for international diplomatic and non-military variables:

- **Coggins (2014) and Griffiths and Butcher (2013)** secession and separatist movement data. This data was used to establish the set of cases from 1945-2015 included in my dataset. If a case was included in either of these datasets, it was included as a conflict-year.
- **Coggins’ recognition data (2014)**. The Coggins data also includes: a country-year observation for each major power; a variable indicating whether that country officially recognizes the separatist group; a variable indicating whether any other major power recognizes the separatist group.
- **United Nations General Assembly Voting Data (Voeten 2012)**. The raw data gives a description of each roll call vote before the general assembly and how each member state voted. All observations with any mention of one of the self-determination movements in either the Coggins (2014) or the Griffiths (2014) data were extracted. Depending on how the holding state voted, each of these roll call votes was coded as either favorable or unfavorable to the separatist movement. In most cases a ‘yes’ vote was counted as

<sup>1</sup> (Voeten 2012)

<sup>2</sup> (Coggins 2011; Fazal and Griffiths 2014; ongoing)

<sup>3</sup> (Bayer 2006)

<sup>4</sup> (Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi 2014)

<sup>5</sup> (USAID 2017)

<sup>6</sup> (Pearson and Baumann, 1993; Kisangani and Pickering 2015)

<sup>7</sup> (SIPRI 2016; Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2008)

favorable. Then, all years with multiple roll call votes for the same movement were collapsed so that each voting state had a statistic for the percentage of their votes that were favorable and unfavorable to the separatist group. This data was considered exhaustive, meaning a lack of observation in the data was taken to mean there was no activity concerning that conflict in that year's UN sessions.

- **Correlates of War (COW) diplomatic exchange data** (Bayer 2006). This data indicates whether and how each state is diplomatically represented in each other state. There is one observation every 5 years, and 3 variables: diplomatic representation level of side 2 at side 1; level of side 1 at side 2; and a binary variable indicating any exchange between sides 1 and 2. This data was considered exhaustive.
- **Threat and Imposition of Sanctions (TIES) data** (Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi 2014). Each observation in this data counts: a case of international economic sanctions; start and end year; offending state country code; “sending” state country codes; the “primary sender” country code; final outcome; and a series of variables describing the type, scope, estimated costs, and domestic parties involved with each sanction-case.
- **US AID** (USAID 2017). This data covers: the amount and type of military and non-military aid to each country in each year; which government party, office, or agency dispersed the aid; and the official purpose of the aid. This data was considered exhaustive.

Four datasets were used to assess military relations with holding and aspiring state actors:

- **International Military Intervention** (Kisangani and Pickering 2015). This data operates at the case level and runs from 1946-2005. This data includes: intervening and receiving state codes; start and end dates; level and direction of intervention, whether supporting or opposing state or non-state actor; and a series of variables describing the characteristics of the intervention. The data was expanded to a dyad-year structure.
- **Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data** on external support (2017). This country-year data includes: the sending state; the location of conflict; type of intervention or support; and the recipient of the assistance, whether state or non-state.
- **Military Intervention of Powerful States** (Sullivan and Koch 2009). This data operates at the case level, detailing the intervention of the American, British, French, Chinese, and Russian governments into the conflicts of other states. It includes: the start and end date of intervention; location of conflict; the recipient of assistance, whether state or non-state; the target of assistance, whether state or non-state; the type and level of intervention; and several variables describing the nature of the conflict.
- **SIPRI arms transfer data** (SIPRI 2016). The raw data takes the form of a “trade register” document. From this document, this was collected for each case: sending party; receiving party; weapon description; number ordered and delivered; year ordered and delivered; and description of the transaction. An indicator variable was generated to specify whether the transfer took the form of “aid,” which means the weapons were delivered with no monetary exchange.

Assembling these 10 data sources into a single dataset required converting it to take the unit of analysis to be third-party–conflict–year. This is because some holding states face multiple

separatist movements in the same years and some separatist movements have conflicts with multiple states. For example, Georgia–South-Ossetia and Georgia–Abkhazia are considered different conflicts so that US–Georgia–South-Ossetia–1995 and US–Georgia–Abkhazia–1995 have two separate observations. At the same time, Turkey-Kurds, Iran-Kurds, and Iraq-Kurds are all considered separate conflicts, and there are separate respective US–Turkey–Kurds–1995, US–Iran–Kurds–1995, and US–Iraq–Kurds–1995 observations. In this manner, the data used to estimate the latent variable model is dyadic in structure, even if not resembling the traditional dyad-year form IR scholars may be accustomed to.

From these aggregated data, the following “manifest” variables (“test questions”) were used for each third-party–conflict–year: logged total foreign aid from 3<sup>rd</sup> party state to holding or aspiring state in constant 1995 USD; percentage of relevant UN roll call votes favorable to aspiring state; percentage of relevant UN roll call votes unfavorable to aspiring state; binary indicator for military aid sent to aspiring state; binary indicator for sanctions against holding state for reasons related to separatist movement; binary indicator for any diplomatic representation between third party and aspiring state; and a binary indicator for official recognition of aspiring state. Note that the first three variables are continuous, and the latter four are binary.

Recognition is modeled as a latent trait,  $\theta_{it}$ , which exists for each third-party–conflict dyad, or unit,  $i = 1, \dots, N$  across each time period  $t = 1, \dots, T$ .  $\theta$  is assumed to determine the values taken by a series of manifest variables,  $y$ , with  $k = 1, \dots, K$  representing the number of items observed.  $y_{itk}$  is the value observed for the manifest variable  $k$  for unit  $i$  in time  $t$ . The difficulty and discrimination parameters  $\alpha_k$  and  $\beta_k$  are estimated for each manifest variable. In a logistic regression, these parameters would be analogous to the slope and intercept. In the testing



environment,  $\beta$  estimates the difficulty of each of the questions, and  $\alpha$  estimates the degree that item discriminates between students in different regions on the latent ability continuum.

I use a dynamic model to address temporal non-independence in the data. That is, I assumed each unit's latent trait is autocorrelated over time. By contrast, a traditional (static) IRT model bases estimates for  $\theta$  only on the items in that observation, not those of prior years. I base the priors for the latent variable  $\theta$  on the estimated value for the previous year of the same unit. For the first observation period for each unit, the prior on  $\theta$  is a standard normal distribution. In each subsequent time period, the prior is normally distributed with mean  $\theta_{i(t-1)}$  and an innovation variance  $\sigma$ , which is estimated from the data and informed by a gamma distribution. It is assumed to be the same for all units in the model. Because this model assumes the latent trait is correlated over time, some sudden jumps in the latent trait will be smoothed out in the estimation, rather than estimated per observation-year, as a static model would.

The priors are summarized as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \theta_{i1} &\sim N(0, 1) \quad \forall i \in [1, N] \\ \theta_{it} &\sim N(\theta_{i(t-1)}, \sigma) \quad \forall i \in [1, N] \text{ and } \forall t \in [2, T] \\ \sigma &\sim \Gamma(1, 1) \mathbf{I}(\sigma > 0) \\ \alpha &\sim N(0, 10) \\ \beta &\sim \Gamma(1, 1) \text{ for dichotomous variables} \\ \beta &\sim N(0, 10) \text{ for continuous variables} \end{aligned}$$

Here,  $\mathbf{I}$  is an indicator function taking the value of 1 when the relationship of the function is true, and 0 otherwise. Putting it all together, the likelihood function is in this form:

$$\mathcal{L} = \prod_{i,t=1}^{N,T} \prod_{k=1}^K \Lambda(\alpha_k - \beta_k \theta_{it})^{y_{itk}} (1 - \Lambda(\alpha_k - \beta_k \theta_{it}))^{1-y_{itk}}$$

$\Lambda$  is the logistic function. I implement a Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) algorithm using R and a Bayesian software and R plugin called STAN. For the latent value  $\theta$ , I take the mean value per third-party–conflict–year across four chains of 1,000 sampling iterations preceded by 400 initial iterations which calibrate the model to the data and then are discarded (usually called “burn-ins”).

I turn now to a brief demonstration of the behavior of the model in a few aspiring and third-party cases before moving on to quantitative tests comparing this model of recognition to that used in prior work.

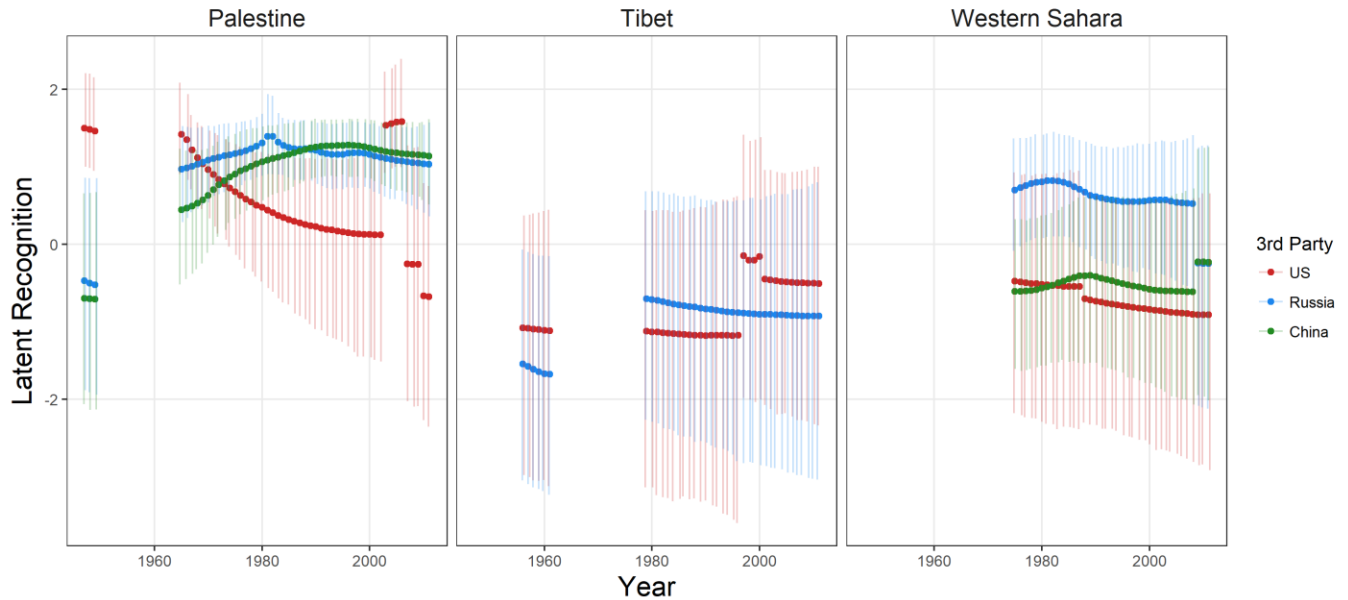
### **Trends in recognition**

Because the model takes a standard normal distribution as its estimate of latent recognition ( $\theta$ ), the estimates fall between -2 and 2. In this context, the most suitable interpretation of the estimated value 0 is that the weight of favorable actions in the data is roughly equal to those that are unfavorable, as far as the aspiring state is concerned. It is roughly analogous to the net approval ratings one often sees in polls of opinion on the president, wherein 0 means that the same percentage of constituents approve as disapprove.

Three long-running cases, Palestine, Tibet, and Western Sahara, serve well as an initial exploration of patterns in latent recognition throughout this time-period. Figure 6 displays recognition of these cases by the US, Russia, and China (the other five countries are left out of this figure to make the graphs easier to read). To speculate briefly, it may not come as a surprise to anyone that while other countries have steadily tended towards lending more credibility to Palestinian claims of statehood, the level of latent recognition of Palestine by the US has dropped

steadily throughout the period. Tibet sees relatively lower recognition among Russia and the US (as the holding state, China is excluded from this middle panel).

**Figure 6: Latent Recognition of Palestine, Tibet, Western Sahara by 3 Major Powers**

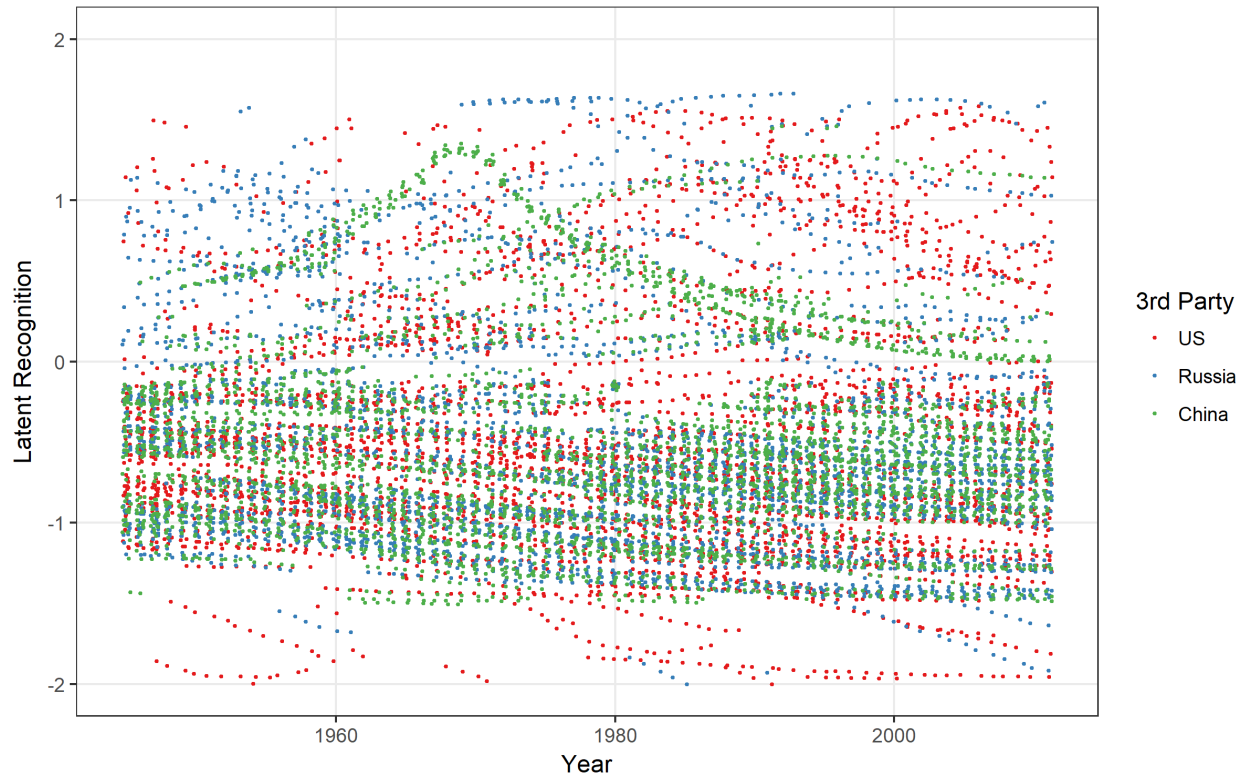


Vertical lines indicate 95% confidence intervals

Looking at the Western Sahara case, the estimates for Russia and the US may reflect the fact that Russia and the US have funneled weapons to the Saharawi (and Algerian) and Moroccan governments, respectively, as well as generally voting along those lines in the UN, even while neither has never taken a position other than neutrality in the conflict.

Figure 7 displays American (red), Russian (blue), and Chinese (green) recognition levels across all cases in the period in question. In this period, each major power interacts with roughly 270 holding-aspiring state conflicts. Each series of dots in the figure 7 depicts a separate case, and plotted together, they come to resemble more of a cloud. What is clear in these figures is that trends in recognition seem to take place at both the conflict level and the level of third party.

**Figure 7: US, China, Russia's Latent Recognition towards all Separatists Throughout Period**



For all three of these major powers, most cases fall somewhere between 0 and -1. This is a position closer to a preference for status quo, meaning lower comparative support for or higher opposition to recognition for separatists. For these three third parties, this graph would seem to support the notion that major powers are on average more often hostile to aspiring states than they are friendly. However, there is evidence of exceptions as well. Certain periods in this data are marked by noticeable trends at the third-party level, for example, China in the 1960s and early 1970s, or the US in the 1980s and 1990s.

## Revisiting hypotheses about recognition

With evident trends in recognition at both the case and the third-party level, it is possible to compare the  $\theta$  estimates of the latent recognition model with official diplomatic recognition as a determinant dichotomous measure. To do this, I revisit a few of Coggins' (2011, 2014) hypotheses regarding major powers' decisions to officially recognize aspiring states.

Specifically, I examine the following hypotheses:

### Domestic-Level Hypotheses

H1: Institutionally empowered groups are more likely to receive Great Power recognition.

H2: Materially stronger groups are more likely to receive Great Power recognition.

### International-Level Hypotheses

H3: Great Powers with secessionist challengers of their own will be less likely to recognize secessionists in other states.

H4: Great Powers will be more likely to recognize secessionists when another Great Power or Powers have already done so.

H5: Great Powers with a conflictual relationship with a home state will be more likely to recognize its secessionists.

H6: Great Powers with a friendly relationship with a home state will be less likely to recognize its secessionists.

Coggins (2014) tests these hypotheses through several domestic and international level variables. “Ethnic federation” is a dichotomous variable indicating whether a given separatist group is an ethno-federal unit. These units should have stable boundaries and certain administrative capacities already stable and well developed. Hypothesis 1 predicts a positive relationship between this variable and levels of recognition. The two dichotomous variables “Violence Level” and “War Victory” were chosen to capture material capability of the separatists. Violence Level indicates that at least 1000 battle deaths occurred in that year of

conflict (UCDP/PRIO 2008), and War Victory indicates that the separatists wrested control of the territory through a military victory. Hypothesis 2 would predict a positive relationship for both these variables.

The first international level variable tests Hypothesis 3: “Number of Challengers” indicates the number of secessionist or separatist challengers the third-party state faces at home in that year, and should see a negative relationship with recognition. “Prior recognition” is a dichotomous variable indicating that at least one other great power has officially recognized the separatists that year. It should be associated positively with recognition to test Hypothesis 4. For Hypothesis 5, the variable “MID” is a dichotomous variable indicating that either the third party or the holding state started a militarized dispute with the other (note that the aspiring state is not party in this variable). This variable should have a positive relationship with recognition. Finally, the two variables “Mutual Democracy” and “Mutual Autocracy” are both dichotomous variables indicating the same regime type (and theorized shared security concerns) between the third-party state and the holding state; both should see a negative relationship with recognition to lend support to Hypothesis 6. These variables are all inherited from Coggins’ (2014) dataset.

Table 2 displays side by side results of two tests. The first column shows the results of a fixed effects regression model with robust standard errors clustered at the dyad level, using the latent recognition variable explained above. The second column displays the Cox Hazard Ratio tests from Coggins (2014). In this kind of test, numbers above 1 are associated with a k-fold increase in likelihood of recognition; numbers below 1 are associated with proportionally lower likelihood of recognition. For the purposes of examining these hypotheses, Cox hazard ratios above and below 1 are analogous to positive and negative coefficients, respectively. I have

included signs in parentheses alongside the Cox estimates to make comparison across the two models more intuitive.

**Table 2: Comparing effects on latent recognition in a dyadic fixed effects model and Coggins’ (2014) Cox hazard model**

Independent Variable	Dyadic Fixed Effects		Coggins (2014) Cox Hazard Ratio <sup>a</sup>
<b>Domestic</b>			
Ethnic Federation	-.14*** (.02)	(+)	5.35 ***
Violence level >999 deaths (Uppsala)	.05** (.02)	(-)	.7 ***
War Victory	-.01 (.01)	(+)	5.33 ***
<b>International</b>			
Number of Challengers	.002*** (.000)	(-)	.76 <sup>b</sup>
Prior recognition by other great power	.14** (.002)	(+)	28.16 ***
MID b/t 3 <sup>rd</sup> party and holding state	.011 (.005)		
Mutual autocracy	-.02** (.009)	(-)	.2 ***
Mutual democracy	-.02** (.001)	(+)	1.22
<b>Constant</b>	-.18*** (.01)		
<b>N<sup>c</sup></b>	1947		1334

p-values are \* .05, \*\* .01, \*\*\* .001  
standard errors in parentheses

<sup>a</sup> Ratios >1 are interpreted as an increased likelihood of recognition; <1 a decreased likelihood

<sup>b</sup> Coggins’ was a dummy variable for “unusually high number” of challengers

<sup>c</sup> Difference in Ns due to 5 more years of data, and the inclusion of a number of cases from Griffiths and Butcher (2013).

Most notably, all three tests show a strong, significant, positive correlation between prior recognition by other great powers and increasing recognition for a given third party. While Coggins (2014) estimated a large 28-fold increase in likelihood of recognition, I estimated an increase in that year’s recognition estimate of about .14, one of the largest effects in this model.

Additionally, I find, as Coggins does, that third parties are less likely to move towards recognition when both they and the holding state share regime type and assumed security interests.

From there, the results diverge. Among the domestic variables, I find decreasing recognition for ethnic federations, slightly increasing recognition for cases with violence, and no effect of military victory; these all differ from a measure based on formal recognition. Among the rest of the international level variables, I find a positive association between number of challengers and recognition, and a positive but insignificant relationship between third-party–holding-state MIDs and recognition. In this model, I thus find support for Hypotheses 2, 4, and 6, and no support for 1, 3, or 5.

**Table 3: Test of latent recognition—dyadic fixed effects by major power 3<sup>rd</sup> parties**

<b>Independent Variable</b> (Dyadic Fixed Effects)	USA	UK	France	Russia	China
<b>Domestic</b>					
Ethnic Federation	-.01 (.02)	-.18*** (.02)	-.2*** (.02)	-.18*** (.01)	-.24*** (.01)
Violence level >999 deaths	-.06** (.02)	.09*** (.02)	.11*** (.02)	.04** (.01)	.03 (.02)
War Victory	-.02 (.05)	-.05 (.05)	-.03 (.04)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.04)
<b>International</b>					
Number of Challengers	.004*** (.000)	.004*** (.000)	.002** (.001)	.005*** (.001)	.003*** (.001)
Prior recognition	.1 (.06)	.23*** (.05)	.02 (.05)	.02 (.04)	.13** (.02)
MID b/t 3 <sup>rd</sup> party and holding state	.02 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	.02 (.01)	.03* (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Mutual autocracy	---	---	---	-.026*** (.006)	-.04*** (.01)
Mutual democracy	-.08*** (.008)	-.06*** (.01)	-.04*** (.01)	-.02*** (.01)	---
<b>N of dyad</b>	273	219	242	256	269

p-values are \* .05, \*\* .01, \*\*\* .001



Table 3 expounds on these results, breaking down these estimates by individual observations of five major powers: The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China. All cases generally follow the results discussed earlier, but there are a few exceptions. US patterns of recognition do follow Coggins' finding with respect to levels of violence, with higher levels of violence associated with movement away from recognition. And the US sees no relationship between movement towards or away from recognition and ethnic federations and separatist groups. Additionally, the significance of prior recognition by major powers seems to be carried primarily by its strong association in the British and Chinese great powers, and null results for the other three great powers.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

How do self-determination groups move from being considered subversive actors to welcome members in the international system? This project aims to provide a new way to answer this question, filling in a gap in the literature on secessionist, separatist, self-determination movements and all sorts of pseudo- and aspiring states. There is rich work on the origins and characteristics of pseudo-states, which have some of the trimmings of the modern state but still lack a general sense of international sovereignty. And there is a separate body of work on the domestic and international determinants of diplomatic decision-making by third parties towards both separatist groups and the states that unwillingly play host to them. The other factors involved in third parties' foreign policy towards separatist groups—military, economic, diplomatic—have generally been set aside, or least not considered as crucial to the advancement and success of the causes of aspiring states.

Moving towards a measure of recognition that takes these other factors into account, in addition to examining formal recognition, constitutes exploring the vast foreign policy gray area between third parties who see only a distant aspiration on the part of a weak pseudo-state and those who see international sovereignty as so inevitable that they jump aboard the bandwagon once someone makes the first move.

In this paper, I push for a conceptualization of “recognition” that is closer to its standard definition: not an easily observed, formally prescribed decision, but an invisible process with tangible foreign policy markers. I situate prior work within this conceptualization, showing them to have covered important questions but relatively small portions, given the breadth of the aspiring state problem. With this in mind, I develop a new measure of recognition based on several kinds of international exchange between holding states, aspiring states, and the third parties with whom international sovereignty lies. The primary interest is not the origin of a discrete decision, but movement towards and away from favorability towards separatist groups and the evolution of their “eligibility” for recognition, measured through formal act.

With a brief slate of tests using this new measure, I find renewed support for several prior findings. Most notably, I find strong support for the hypothesis that official recognition by major powers makes for increasing levels of latent recognition by other major powers, and that third-party states with similar types of government to the holding state tend to take actions that reflect animosity towards those countries’ separatist groups. I also find partial support for the hypothesis that higher levels of violence tend to cause movement towards recognition.

International responses to separatist, secessionist, and self-determination movements is still a relatively poorly understood foreign policy arena, with many unasked questions. Do

smaller third parties behave similarly to major powers? Do conflict-level variables like nonviolent movements or human rights abuses affect the movement of third parties along this continuum? Conceptualizing recognition as a process deeper than diplomacy should allow future work on the topic to buttress prior work by taking into account the effects of foreign policy decisions subtler and less politically volatile than official recognition.

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