

# Containing Nationalism: Culture, Economics and Indirect Rule in Corsica

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## Abstract

Central governments in multinational states frequently deploy indirect rule to contain peripheral nationalism. Through the exchange of economic resources for political control, local notables are co-opted into cementing loyalty to the central state. Although nationalism often has cultural roots, these can fail to bear fruit because indirect rulers prevent them from developing. When the incentives sustaining support for indirect rulers change, this can open a window of opportunity for nationalism. This article examines how culture, institutions and economics influence center-periphery relations, specifically the demand for autonomy and nationalist parties. Utilizing new, disaggregated data and an original survey from the French island of Corsica, we show that indirect rulers have managed to contain nationalist parties in culturally distinct communes, specifically those that are more dependent on public funds. Only where a thriving private sector offers alternatives to state dependence, lessening the force of indirect rule, is cultural distinctiveness associated with nationalist voting.

## Keywords

nationalism, indirect rule, territorial politics, Corsica, principal-agent relations

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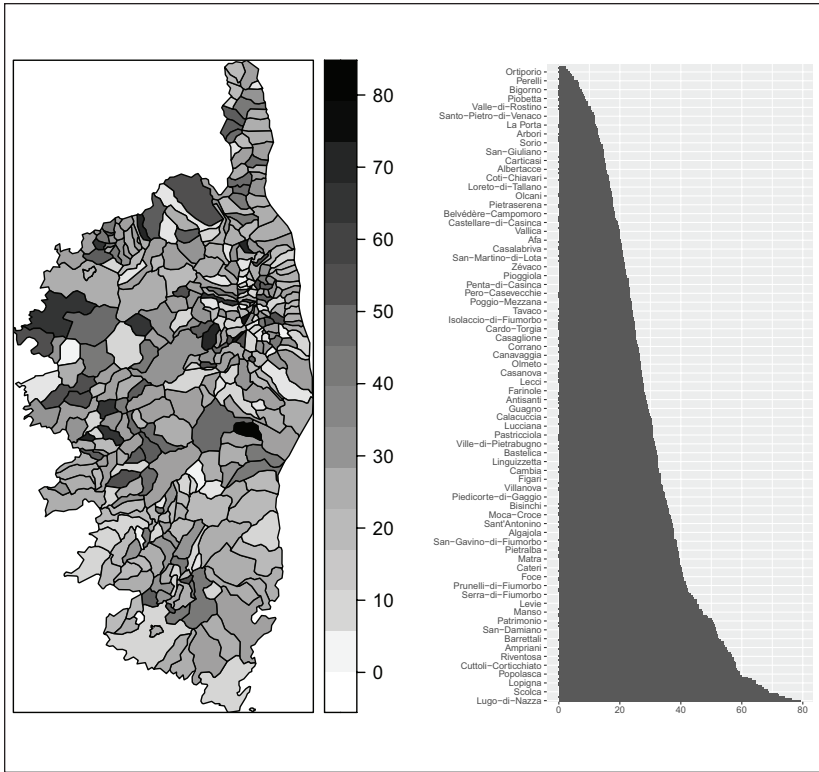
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Nationalist demands for greater regional autonomy and even outright secession are on the rise (Griffiths, 2017; Roeder, 2018; Sambanis & Milanovic, 2014). Many different explanations have been proposed for this rise, which has occurred in both the developed and developing world. Despite varieties of nationalism, there is a broad consensus that differences in culture—notably, a distinct language and a separate religion—along with legacies of prior statehood (Sorens, 2012) and lost autonomy (Cederman et al. 2015; Siroky & Cuffe, 2015; Germann & Sambanis, 2020) play an important role. Since nationalists aim to make the boundaries of their nation congruent with those of the state (Gellner, 1983; Hechter, 2000), this implies that nationalism ought to be strongest in the most culturally distinctive, “historic” peripheries that “missed their turn” in becoming independent states. Well-known European examples include Catalonia, the Basque Country, Flanders, and Scotland.

A lesser-known case is Corsica—probably because nationalism there has not been notable, at least until recently. In fact, nationalism sometimes fails to emerge just where conventional explanations suggest it should. Corsica has long seemed to constitute such an outlier: the Corsican language is distinct from French,<sup>1</sup> the island has a prior history (albeit brief) of statehood, is at a remove from the capital, and has maintained a strong cultural identity, despite repeated foreign occupations and assimilation efforts.<sup>2</sup> The mainland has also tended to ignore the economic development of the island, making cultural frustration, economic deprivation and the development of peripheral nationalism all the more likely (Fazi, 2014). Moreover, Paris has long resisted concessions to *any* historic minority language, including Alsatian, Breton, Occitan, and Corsican.<sup>3</sup>

Yet despite all these ingredients, modern Corsican nationalism only appeared in the 1970s, and initially received a marginal share of the vote—even in regional elections most favorable to nationalism (De la Calle & Fazi, 2010, p. 406).<sup>4</sup> Nationalism has experienced a strong electoral surge since 2008, following the breakdown of the party system and a sharp decline in armed violence, which prompted moderate and radical nationalist lists to merge and garner a significant share of the vote.<sup>5</sup> In the 2010 and 2015 regional elections, their vote share climbed to 35%, and then to a remarkable 56% in 2017 (Fazi, 2018; Supplemental Appendix 1). Between 2004 and 2017, the absolute number of votes cast for nationalist parties more than tripled (from ca. 21,000 to 67,000), and since 2015 the leaders of both the main regional institutions have come from nationalist parties.

While French remains the only official language, nationalists have been the main advocates for the Corsican language. Thus, speaking Corsican in official settings represents a political statement—precisely what was intended when the head of the regional assembly held his inaugural speech in Corsican.



**Figure 1.** Spatial variation (left) and ranked (right) nationalist voting in Corsica by commune, 2015 regional elections (1st round).

Several French politicians called this “unacceptable” and “a danger to the unity of France” (Quinault-Maupoil, 2015).

Not only was the rise of Corsican nationalism late, it was also territorially uneven (see Figure 1). More puzzling still, nationalist parties have often done particularly well in some of the *least* culturally Corsican areas along the coast, whereas some of the traditional communes in the island’s rural and mountainous interior have seemed impervious to nationalism (De la Calle & Fazi, 2010). If nationalism really is driven by cultural factors, why have nationalist parties been *least* successful in some of the *most* culturally traditional parts of Corsica? By comparison, nationalist parties in Catalonia, for instance, fare much better in the areas where Catalan is widely spoken (Bartomeus, 2018).

The theory we propose and assess in this article makes sense of this (seeming) paradox by focusing on the institution of *indirect rule*, which has been used throughout history by states to govern their culturally diverse populations. We contend that indirect rule moderates the effect of culture on nationalism. Empirically, the analysis shows that there may indeed be a greater demand for regional autonomy in places with culturally distinct electorates, but this demand is only expressed and translated into actual *votes* for nationalist parties (that advocate such autonomy) where indirect rule has been weakened.

Prior research at the individual level has established that native Corsicans, who have a stronger regional identity than those who immigrated from the mainland, are more nationalist in their voting behavior.<sup>6</sup> But the customary link between cultural identity and nationalism is contained by indirect rule, a system in which local notables who profit from the status quo seek to quiet nationalism by persuasion, the purse and other means. Indirect rulers profit economically, since Paris partly delegates the capacity to allocate public funds to them; they benefit socially, since the arrangement invests them with the higher status that proximity and access to the center of power confers; and it serves them politically, since the capacity and resources they receive help keep them in office.

By this logic, Nationalism should be stronger in constituencies with *alternative* sources of revenue beyond the immediate control of the indirect rulers. Tourism has become the number one alternative to state dependency in Corsica: In 2015, it was estimated that tourists spent some 2.5 billion EUR a year on the island, accounting for a third of Corsica's GDP (INSEE, 2015, p. 5). Hence, we expect that in touristically thriving municipalities indirect rulers will be less able to contain the connection between cultural identity and nationalism.

The next section discusses existing theories of nationalist demand and voting in greater depth and explains how they relate to our explanatory framework. Subsequently, we derive specific hypotheses about the factors shaping the demand for autonomy and nationalist voting. Section three tests these hypotheses using new disaggregated data, both quantitative and qualitative, and interprets them within the Corsican context. The last part discusses the implications of this analysis for improving our understanding of peripheral nationalism and the role of indirect rule in potentially containing it.

## Why (No) Peripheral Nationalism?

Electoral support for parties demanding further regional autonomy—or even independence—is on the rise in countries as diverse as Belgium, Bosnia, Georgia, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine or the UK (Bustikova, 2020;

Elias & Tronconi, 2011; Hechter, 2000; Jolly, 2015; Keating, 2013; Mazzoleni & Mueller, 2016; Siroky et al., 2017).<sup>7</sup> That said, nationalist party success in European peripheries such as Galicia, Sardinia, Sicily, Cornwall and Wales, has largely been limited (De la Calle, 2015).

Whether subdued or successful, in most peripheral regions, the success of nationalist parties is highly variable at the *local* level. This deserves the careful study of politically relevant sub-regional units. Rather than pitting “separatist” Catalonia versus “non-separatist” Corsica (cf. Lepic, 2017), or providing another macro-level comparison, our objective is to contribute a finer-grained study of peripheral nationalism. We focus on sub-national variation in Corsica, at the same time situating it within a broader empirical and theoretical context.

### *Culture and Economy*

A prominent strand in the literature holds that the *demand* for greater peripheral autonomy and/or outright independence hinges on the strength of a given regional (or “national”) identity. The reasoning behind this cultural understanding of peripheral nationalism is intuitive: Individuals and groups for whom a distinct social identity is salient tend to be most interested in wresting autonomy from culturally alien central governments (Hechter, 2013). On this basis, the demand for nationalism ought to increase with the strength of a group’s attachment to its national identity (Boylan, 2015; Connor, 1994; Costa-Font & Tremosa-Balcells, 2008; Hagendoorn et al., 2008; Muñoz & Tormos, 2015; Pattie et al., 1999; Smith, 2000). National identity matters, on this account, not only because it generates internalized values that shape individual behavior (Conversi, 2010), but also because it provides symbolic, “objective” structures that guide action, much like more visible material structures (Edles, 1999; Znaniecki, 1919).

Culturalist theories aim to specify the symbolic structures that form the identity of a nation, uniting living and dead into a common historical narrative (Anderson, 1983; Calhoun, 1993, p. 232). For many, a common *language* cements this cultural solidarity (Chandra, 2012; Fearon, 2003; Gellner, 1983; Laitin, 1994, 1998; Milroy, 1987). While far from being the only cultural element that matters, differences in linguistic proficiency are often related to social (im)mobility and thus readiness to mobilize politically (Marquart, 2018, p. 836f.). Moreover, distinct national languages tend to flourish in places where minority groups are territorially concentrated, segregated from individuals of other nationalities, and/or located at the periphery of states. Sorens (2012), for example, presents compelling cross-national evidence that actually speaking a regional language promotes secessionism (cf. Onuch & Hale, 2018, p. 96; Vogt, 2018).

Nevertheless, there is often more to the story of nationalism than national identity and language. Whereas the number of people speaking a sub-state language has remained constant or even declined in many places, recent developments in Western Europe have shown that nationalist demands for greater regional self-rule have increased.<sup>8</sup> In France, the proportion of people speaking regional languages such as Corsican, Breton or Alsatian has dramatically declined (Héran et al., 2002, p. 4), but ethno-regionalism in French politics has not disappeared, even though the French language is locally dominant. In some places, notably Corsica, nationalism has even flourished.

Economic factors have also been an important part of the story of nationalism (Bartkus, 1999). Whether nationalist demands are more likely to arise among economically advantaged or disadvantaged regions/individuals (or both) is debatable, however (Milanovic & Sambanis, 2014; Siroky et al., 2013). On the one hand, citizens of relatively richer regions (such as Catalonia or Flanders) might resist subsidizing poorer regions (Dalle Mulle, 2018). Greater regional autonomy becomes synonymous with more sway over regional revenue and less territorial redistribution. On the other, citizens of relatively poorer regions can feel exploited by culturally alien rulers. Then greater regional autonomy becomes synonymous with region-specific investments, sustainable development and eventual wealth (Bolton & Roland, 1997; Hale, 2008; Le Breton & Weber, 2003).

### *Indirect Rule as an Intervening Variable*

Both cultural differences and economic grievances must be articulated, mobilized and channeled by members of the regional elite to become politically salient. Even the most culturally distinct *demos* can be persuaded of the benefits of the status quo by politically skilled local leaders with the right carrots and sticks. *Indirect rule* empowers local leaders to do just that: they obtain a measure of discretion over the distribution of public resources from their central state principals in exchange for ensuring the continual political loyalty of their community (Gerring et al., 2011; Naseemullah & Staniland, 2016).

Indirect rule consists in a central (or an external) power's "cooptation of [local] notables sitting atop relatively rigid hierarchical social systems" (Boone, 2003; Darbon, 1988, p. 124; cf. Doyle, 1986; Gerring et al., 2011; Hechter, 2000; Iyer, 2010; Kocher & Monteiro, 2016; Lawrence, 2013; Souleimanov et al., 2018).<sup>9</sup> This definition highlights the distinctive cultural identity of authorities in a given sub-unit of a state or colony. These authorities may hail from the center of the state/empire, which characterizes direct rule, or from the locality itself, which constitutes indirect rule.

The local (native) rulers frequently have a legitimacy advantage over their culturally alien counterparts from the center, which has implications for sub-unit nationalism if the center cannot acquire legitimacy.<sup>10</sup>

A local elite benefitting from indirect rule mediates the distribution of resources from the center to the periphery. This situation has been usefully characterized in the literature as a principal-agent relationship (Jensen & Meckling, 1976): the central government acts as the principal towards its peripheral agents, who in turn deal directly with local subjects and secure their loyalty on the principal's behalf. So long as the system channels resources in a politically suitable (i.e., clientelistic) manner, the demand for autonomy or secession can be contained, *notwithstanding* the culturally alien nature of the central authorities.

In this way, despite the presence of a strong and distinct national identity, indirect rule as a political institution effectively curbs peripheral nationalism. The effectiveness of such a system evidently depends on the degree to which citizens cannot get access to *alternative* sources of revenue beyond the control of the local authorities. Wherever such alternative resources arise, they ought to weaken the indirect rulers' control over voters (Bustikova & Corduneanu-Huci, 2017; Hechter, 1987; Hicken, 2011, p. 290ff). Yet the waning of indirect rule has been largely overlooked in the literature. This is unfortunate, for it potentially portends the rise of nationalism. We argue that when alternative sources of revenue become available, the legitimacy of central rulers and their local agents ought to decline, allowing the demand for autonomy to flourish and creating an opportunity for astute nationalist politicians to gain a foothold.

This leads us to expect a strong positive correlation between cultural identity and nationalism *only in places where such alternative means are present*—thus, where indirect rule is weaker. By contrast, where local officeholders can plausibly argue that *they* alone successfully deliver economic benefits to citizens of their commune—and not their nationalist challengers—cultural identity should *not* translate into nationalist success.<sup>11</sup> If true, this conjecture would go some way toward helping to resolve the central paradox motivating our inquiry—why nationalism appears weakest in some of the *most* culturally distinct parts of Corsica.

## **Of Corse**

### *Case Selection and Generalizability*

We suggest three main reasons why Corsica is a critical case for theories of nationalism. First, with a history of independent statehood,<sup>12</sup> a distinct regional language, clearly defined borders and distance from the state capital (Paris),

Corsica should be a poster child for cultural explanations of regional secessionism. All of these factors are formidable predictors of secessionism (Sorens, 2012, p. 96). That they are not in Corsica indicates that there is more to the story.

Second, the institution of indirect rule in Corsica, as elsewhere, has for years managed to contain nationalism. Many central governments are faced with culturally distinctive, distant and potentially rebellious peripheries. We contend that indirect rule and economic considerations can significantly moderate cultural demands, and we use the Corsican case to illustrate this phenomenon. Indirect rule is a common and often effective means to contain such nationalism (Hechter, 2000) and Corsica has fit this model well. It was economically dependent on Paris, facilitating the exchange of political support (by Corsica for France) for material resources (from Paris to Corsica) such as subsidies, investments, or preferential VAT rates. To the extent that Corsican indirect rulers were financially dependent on Paris, they were induced to discourage nationalist feelings.

Corsican indirect rulers are elected by the people, but traditionally have been beholden to state-wide parties competing along a traditional left-right spectrum, and their leaders combined elected offices in Paris with local mandates (*cumul des mandats*), which ties them to the center through a dual mandate. Thus, indirect rulers maintain a direct or indirect exchange relationship with the center. They are agents of inter-territorial redistribution<sup>13</sup> that buy votes more or less covertly to remain in power, and are traditionally organized on a clan basis (Lenclud, 1988). Since the central government is opposed to peripheral nationalism, all incumbents are induced to oppose nationalist demands for greater fiscal and political autonomy.

Rival political actors and movements—obligated neither to Paris nor to local notables—have challenged this system of indirect rule, however, and undermined its ability to contain nationalism in some parts of the island. Compared to indirect rulers, nationalists offer a broader political vision, one focused on the entire region/island and not on specific localities (Anderson, 1983). Economically, nationalists have a vision that does not rely on central government transfers, but rather on fiscal autonomy and endogenous development. Much like their Scottish, Catalan, Basque and Flemish counterparts, Corsican nationalists emphasize their present and future economic potential as more autonomous or even independent polities (Lecours, 2012). The fact that this system seems to have broken down in just a few decades, though far from evenly across the island, is further grounds to examine the case, since it will provide insights into other cases as well.

The third reason to investigate Corsica is that it illustrates the complex relationship between decentralization, regionalization and nationalism



(Brancati, 2006; Horowitz, 1985; Lublin, 2012; Massetti & Schakel, 2017). Paradoxically, while decentralization after 1982 strengthened indirect rulers' grip (Briquet, 1997), it also paved the way for their main rivals to regroup, consolidate, gain visibility and eventually dethrone them. The main factor in this process was regional proportional representation, which provided equal opportunities to all parties.

On the one hand, French decentralization allowed local power-holders to manage many financial resources more autonomously than previously.<sup>14</sup> Corsica's long-time indirect rulers no longer had to negotiate as extensively with the central state about the grants they wanted to give to their allies, so their control at the local level grew with decentralization. In touristic and resource-rich communes, by contrast, decentralization enabled rival political groups—especially those connected to the nationalist movement—to acquire more independent resources and ultimately to contend successfully for political power.

On the other, decentralization also carried with it a distinct regionalization dynamic. With the creation of the Corsican Assembly in 1982 elected using proportionality, and the Corsican Executive Council in 1992<sup>15</sup> appointed by that assembly, a separate party system developed, one that was detached from the formally bipolar system in the rest of France. Regionalization thereby enabled nationalists to insert themselves into official institutions, giving them a highly visible tribune to influence the island's political agenda. As a result, the Corsican case allows us to study the longer-term consequences of decentralization and regionalization.

## *Hypotheses*

We now formulate five specific expectations. Indirect rulers effectively control their own constituents only to the extent that they (a) have more or less exclusive access to the central state's resources and (b) can prevent local alternative sources from being seized by other parties and funneled out of its coffers. If dependence on indirect rulers in a given locality decreases, then their control over voters also diminishes. The emergence of *alternative* sources of revenue—notably those connected to tourism—has not been evenly distributed across the island. Communes with better economic endowments and more tourist opportunities have been increasingly able to utilize these resources as a result of decentralization. Consequently, we expect:

*H1: Nationalist parties gain wherever indirect rulers' control capacity has declined due to the availability of alternative sources of revenue.*

Our theory further implies that cultural identity matters for explaining the differential demand for regional autonomy, but that indirect rule moderates this relationship. Thus:

*H2a: In communes without indirect rule, the demand for regional autonomy increases with the prevalence of Corsican culture.*

By contrast:

*H2b: In communes with indirect rule, the demand for regional autonomy is not associated with the strength of cultural identity.*

Further, we expect that:

*H3: The relationship between indirect rule and low nationalist support holds after accounting for the available level of non-state economic revenues, which is independently associated with greater demand for autonomy.<sup>16</sup>*

And, finally:

*H4: Greater demand for regional autonomy translates into more nationalist voting, but only in communes with weak indirect rule.*

To assess these expectations, we first estimate the direct effect of culture on nationalist party success, without accounting for either economic resources or indirect rule. We then show how introducing these additional factors sheds new light on both the demand for autonomy and nationalist party success. These propositions modify some of the classic cultural explanations for nationalism, and indicate that culture does not influence nationalism *directly*, because political institutions like indirect rule and economic considerations can intervene. Culture influences the success of nationalist parties *indirectly*, however, through its effect on the demand for greater autonomy. This demand for greater regional autonomy and indirect rule interact to shape the differential success of nationalist parties, accounting for disparities in resource endowments across communes and other factors that distinguish them from one another. Where more non-state resources are available to citizens, independent of the center and its agents, culturally strong areas should be much more likely to vote for nationalist parties. In this way, culture still matters in a significant way, but only in communes where key political institutions do not contain its direct effect on nationalism.

## Quantitative Analysis

### *Research Design Considerations*

To assess these propositions as well as rival explanations, we conducted an original survey among 264 locally embedded experts across 105 Corsican communes. We asked about the share of Corsican speakers and the demand for autonomy in their commune, *inter alia*, and then overlaid responses with actual vote shares from the 2015 regional elections, as well as observational data from the census. The survey's purpose was to overcome the serious data limitations that would have made this study otherwise unfeasible.

On the one hand, the French census does not ask any question on *language* spoken. On the other, non-census surveys among voters contain questions on identity and voting, but lack information on residence and thus *local power structures* such as indirect rule. Moreover, since indirect rule is difficult to capture using standard observational data, local experts are much better positioned to assess whether the commune is controlled by local notables and their proxies, and just how their control over voters operates in that commune. For example, sometimes electoral support is purchased via public jobs, project subsidies or other targeted benefits; at other times, voters are coerced to vote; and in yet in still other cases, electoral records are brazenly forged or there is proxy voting.<sup>17</sup>

For these reasons, we conducted our own expert survey. Although we were unable to acquire responses from all 360 communes, we show in Supplemental Appendix 2 that our sample is statistically representative in the most crucial ways, which allows us to make some general inferences about the whole island. We sampled former and current mayors, councilors, members of the Corsican Assembly, civil servants, journalists, and university researchers. All individuals were selected on the basis of their expertise in local cultural, political and economic affairs, so they could accurately answer questions about conditions in *their* commune. We contacted 322 persons and received responses from 264 (82%). The survey was run online between 21 February and 5 April 2017. Results were then averaged to the communal level when more than one expert for that commune responded.<sup>18</sup> From a total of 105 distinct communes:<sup>19</sup> one expert replied in 65 communes, between two and five in 35 communes, and more than nine experts in five communes, resulting in an average of 2.5 experts per commune.

In addition to the key survey question about the local demand for more autonomy (**Autonomy Demand**), we also examine a second dependent variable—the actual combined vote share for nationalist parties in

that commune (**Nationalist Vote**). To measure the vote share of nationalist parties in each commune, we rely on the first round of the 2015 regional elections, when nationalists won for the first time ever.<sup>20</sup> Thanks to proportionality, regional elections are more mathematically meaningful (with fewer wasted votes) than would be the case under majority rules (i.e., in French parliamentary elections).

To assess the internal validity of our findings, we further conducted 51 semi-structured interviews with current and former politicians as well as academics, civil servants and activists in Corsican politics. These interviews provide additional insights into the specific mechanisms operating at the communal level.

### *Data and Methodology*

Our survey asked, in French: “How much more autonomy do the inhabitants of your commune want for Corsica?” Answers ranged from (1) “none at all” to (9) “a lot” (**Autonomy Demand**). This is the first dependent variable. The second dependent variable is the success of nationalist parties, measured as the combined vote shares of such parties in the 2015 regional elections (first round) per municipality/commune (**Nationalist Vote**). The range is from 0% to 79% across all communes (Figure 1) and from 2% to 76% in our sample (see Supplemental Appendix 2).

We treat these two dependent variables as related but distinct, and thus estimate a two-stage Seemingly Unrelated Regression Equation model, also known as a SURE or SUR model (Greene, 2012, pp. 330–331). It is a generalization of an OLS model that consists of several regression equations, in this case two, each with its own dependent variable and potentially different sets of independent variables, with the error terms that are correlated across equations. Stage One predicts the demand for regional autonomy (**Autonomy Demand**), using culture, indirect rule, economics and controls, while Stage Two predicts nationalist party success (**Nationalist Vote**) using autonomy demands, culture, indirect rule, economics and controls.

Survey respondents were further asked to assess the strength of *cultural identity* as follows: “How many people can speak Corsican in the commune where you are eligible to vote?” Five answers were possible from (1) “less than 20%” to (5) “more than 80%.” We then merged categories 4 and 5 since the number of 5s was very small (**Language**). We also consider a simple binary indicator for communes in which the proportion of Corsican speakers was greater than 40%, without changes to our result (see below).<sup>21</sup>

To measure *indirect rule*, we asked: “How would you describe the power relations in your commune over the past 30 years?” Four answers were possible: (1) “Frequent turnover in power”; (2) “Domination by the same group of people over the entire period”; (3) “Domination by somebody that came to power during that period”; and (4) “Recent defeat of a well-established group of people.” We then recoded the answers into a dummy variable that takes the value 1 if there was “Domination by the same group of people over the entire period” and 0 otherwise (**Indirect Rule**).<sup>22</sup> The importance of *economic revenue* outside the public sector, and hence not directly under the control of the central state and its indirect rulers, is assessed via the importance of tourism revenue. We asked: “To what degree is tourism important for your commune?”. Answers were again given on a scale from (0) “not at all” to (9) “very much” (**Tourism**).

We control for several potentially confounding factors. Tourist resources may be correlated with more intergroup contact (especially in the service industry) between Corsicans and outsiders (both mainlanders and seasonal workers from former French colonies). This could generate grievances that drive a demand for greater autonomy and also more nationalist voting. To measure the effect of intergroup contact in the labor market, we asked two questions to create indicators of the Cultural Division of Labor (CDL; Hechter, 1978)<sup>23</sup>: “Do recent newcomers to Corsica more easily find *lower-level* jobs than those that have lived here for generations?” (**CDL low**), and “Do recent newcomers to Corsica more easily find *higher-level* jobs than those that have lived here for generations?” (**CDL high**). Answers for both ranged from (0) “not at all” to (4) “yes indeed.” We created two indicators for the presence of a low and a high CDL.

Finally, we classified experts as belonging to the Left, Right or Nationalist camp (Party) or none to make sure that our results were not biased by the ideology of those answering. Communes were then classified as either having no nationalist expert ( $N = 60$ ), at least one nationalist and one non-nationalist (17), and only nationalist experts (28). Indicators for unemployment, area, population size, density, age structure and economic sectors were drawn from official census data (INSEE), and we manually created two indicators for coastal localities and those located within one of the two main agglomerations, Ajaccio and Bastia (see Supplemental Appendix 2).

## Empirical Results

We begin with descriptive statistics. First, on our two dependent variables, the *vote* share of nationalist parties in the first round of the 2015 regional

elections reaches a mean of 29.3% in our sample of expert communes (Supplemental Appendix 2), and the mean demand for regional *autonomy* per sampled commune is 5 on a scale from 1 to 9. The two variables are moderately correlated (Pearson's  $r = 0.411$ ; Supplemental Appendix 4a). Note that while nationalist experts score the demand for autonomy slightly higher than non-nationalists (mean: 5.4 vs. 4.9; median: 5 for both groups), that difference is not significant. The same is true for language proportions (mean: 2.4 vs. 2.7; median: both 2, on a scale from 1–5). For Indirect Rule too, when coded as a dummy, nationalists are slightly more likely to perceive its absence than non-nationalists (in 57% vs. 53% of the cases), but again the difference is not statistically significant. Language and tourism also correlate moderately ( $r = -0.386$ ; Supplemental Appendix 4b).

Table 1 displays the results of our two-stage SUR model. In Stage One (top of Table 1), we model an interaction between indirect rule and cultural identity to predict the differential demand for regional autonomy across communes. Consistent with our expectation, the interaction of indirect rule and culture is negative, meaning that in communes controlled by indirect rulers, there is *less* demand for regional autonomy, even when Corsican identity is strong. Where indirect rule is absent, there is *more* demand for autonomy among communes with a stronger Corsican identity. Moreover, after accounting for both indirect rule and cultural identity in a commune, we find that greater tourist revenues also positively predict the demand for more autonomy. This suggests that the existence of alternative revenue sources can increase demand for more autonomy. Although positively related to voting for nationalist parties, tourism is not a significant predictor of the vote itself (stage two). It does directly influence the demand for more autonomy (stage one), however, which in turn shapes nationalist voting. These effects are robust to the inclusion of controls, including unemployment, between-group inequality (CDL low and high) and the ideology (Left/Right vs. Nationalist) of experts surveyed.<sup>24</sup>

In Stage Two (lower part of Table 1), we change the demand for more autonomy from a dependent variable into an independent variable in order to explain the success of nationalist parties. We interact the demand for autonomy with indirect rule, accounting for the strength of cultural identity and economic resources. The interaction between the demand for autonomy and indirect rule negatively predicts the nationalist vote, meaning that greater demand for autonomy translates into nationalist voting mainly where indirect rule is absent or weak.<sup>25</sup>

To assess the substantive size of these findings, we present three marginal effect plots. Figure 2 (left) shows how, in communes under the control of indirect rulers (“1”), an increase in Corsican speakers (“Culture”) has no

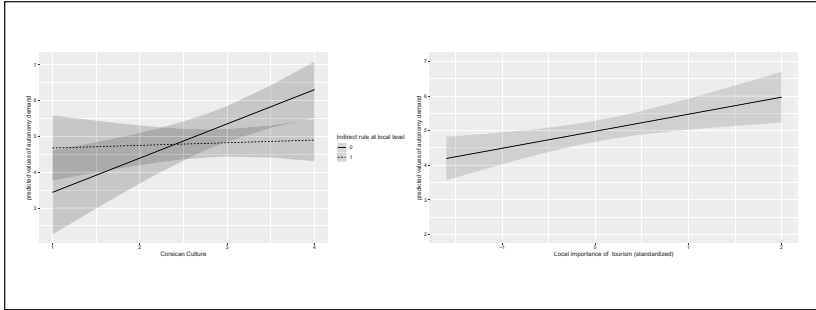
**Table 1.** SUR Model Results.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Stage one: Autonomy demand</b>			
Constant	4.115 (0.610)***	2.468 (0.866)**	3.345 (1.133)**
Language	0.384 (0.186)*	0.956 (0.284)**	0.853 (0.315)**
Indirect rule	-0.455 (0.332)	2.120 (1.040)*	2.225 (1.349)*
Tourism	0.468 (0.178)*	0.492 (0.173)**	0.471 (0.188)*
Language × Indirect rule	—	-0.882 (0.339)*	-0.853 (0.368)*
Expert(s) from nationalist party/-ies	—	—	0.050 (0.192)
CDL low	—	—	-0.782 (0.341)
CDL high	—	—	0.196 (0.395)
% Unemployed	—	—	-0.043 (0.053)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.104	0.164	0.212
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.075	0.129	0.132
N	98	98	88
<b>Stage two: Nationalist vote</b>			
Constant	16.390 (6.183)**	6.821 (7.851)	4.329 (10.215)
Autonomy demand	3.418 (0.858)***	5.401 (1.330)***	5.292 (1.410)***
Language	0.137 (1.580)	-0.248 (1.572)	-0.138 (1.731)
Indirect rule	-6.419 (2.790)*	10.838 (9.341)	9.082 (10.201)
Tourism	0.209 (1.537)	0.728 (1.538)	1.418 (1.703)
Autonomy Demand × Indirect rule	—	-3.346 (1.731) <sup>+</sup>	-3.106 (1.856) <sup>+</sup>
Expert(s) from nationalist party/-ies	—	—	2.149 (1.653)
CDL low	—	—	4.187 (3.027)
CDL high	—	—	2.152 (3.401)
% Unemployed	—	—	-0.237 (0.455)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.225	0.255	0.290
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.191	0.215	0.208
N	98	98	88

Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in brackets, <sup>+</sup>p < .1. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

effect on autonomy demands. By contrast, when indirect rule is weak or absent (“0”), there is greater demand in communes with more Corsican speakers. Hence, to understand the impact of culture on the demand for more autonomy, one needs to take into account the intervening effect of local political institutions, in this case the traditional ruling elite that operate as indirect rulers of the island.<sup>26</sup>

The right-hand graph in Figure 2 shows the effect of tourism on the demand for autonomy, controlling for the strength of cultural identity and



**Figure 2.** The effect of culture by indirect rule and tourism on autonomy demands.

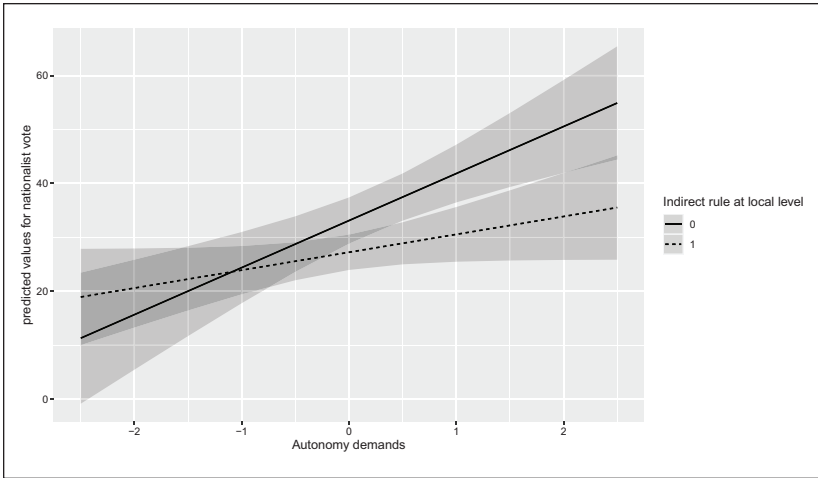
Based on model 2, Table 1, upper part. 95% confidence intervals. Indirect rule at local level: 0 = absent, 1 = present.

indirect rule. It illustrates that when communes possess more state-independent revenues from tourism, they are also more likely to demand autonomy compared to places where such revenues are more limited.

Figure 3 shows the second step of our analysis, which focuses on how the differential demand for autonomy influences nationalist voting at the local level. Where indirect rulers are present, moving from a commune with the lowest autonomy demand to one with the highest is predicted to increase the vote share for nationalists from 18% to 35%, roughly a factor of two. When indirect rulers are absent or minimal, the predicted vote share for nationalist parties jumps from 10% to over 50%, that is, by a factor of five (and the confidence intervals no longer overlap). Indirect rulers thus clearly need to be taken into account when assessing the connection between autonomy demands and nationalist party success.

The evidence suggests that this two-step interaction model offers analytical traction for understanding Corsican nationalism. The strength of cultural identity positively predicts the demand for more autonomy, but this relationship is mediated by indirect rule. Indeed, only where there is weak or no indirect rule do we uncover the strong positive association between the strength of culture and the demand for more regional autonomy. In addition, we show that greater access to non-state controlled economic opportunities, such as tourism, also positively predicts autonomy demands, consistent with expectations about the economic conditions that shape the influence of indirect rule. Finally, greater demand for autonomy is associated with more nationalist voting, yet again this effect is much stronger in communes free from indirect rulers.





**Figure 3.** The effect of autonomy demands on nationalist voting, by indirect rule. Based on model 2, Table 1, lower part. Autonomy demand is standardized. 95% confidence intervals. Indirect rule at local level: 0 = absent, 1 = present.

## Qualitative Evidence

We have shown that cultural identity does not directly influence the demand for increased autonomy. Where traditional elites have remained in charge of local affairs, no autonomy demands ensued, despite favorable culturalist predispositions. Although there remain pockets of traditional rule, nationalists have been able to gain significant ground in Corsica where indirect rule has been weakened. This section examines the causal mechanisms behind these effects using information obtained through 51 semi-structured interviews, and focuses on the following points:

- 1a. Indirect rulers have controlled local politics through enforced and, at times, forged voter intentions, turnout and results;
- 1b. They have handed out rewards in the form of public or para-state (e.g., in electricity supply companies) jobs and benefits to their supporters, but not to others;
- 2a. The availability of alternative economic resources (tourism opportunities, private local resources) has weakened the effect of such control; and
- 2b. Weaker control has opened space for rivals, chief among them nationalist parties.

### *Traditional Control and Rewards (1a + 1b)*

On the first point, clientelism has always been described as one of the pillars of the Corsican political system, both before the decentralization reforms of 1982 (Lenclud, 1988; Pomponi, 1976; Ravis-Giordani, 1976) and afterwards (Briquet, 1997). Although the exchange of votes for favors has become less important over time, it nevertheless remains a fact of political life in Corsica. Sometimes this takes the form of *proxy voting* to secure the votes of persons who are not entirely trusted. These persons are asked (or even forced) to name a proxy—that is, a person who will vote on their behalf but whom the controller (the candidate himself or herself, a person of his staff, or any supporter) trusts.

Proxy voting can go wrong, however, and then elections are nullified due to irregularities. For example, at the 2014 local elections in Ajaccio, the number of proxy votes increased from 1,780 to 2,380 (7.5% and 9% of total votes) between the 1st and 2nd round. Above all, the Administrative Tribunal of Bastia (2014, p. 11) stated that: “There was a systematically organized manipulation (or maneuver) in the making of proxies and their registration by the competent authorities, including the Ajaccio police commissariat.”<sup>27</sup>

Many interviewees stated that clientelism remains important, even if local public administration has in general modernized and moved toward a more meritocratic approach for recruitment and promotion. For example, one civil servant noted that:

Recruitment for local jobs is essentially political, except in case of functional necessity. Politicians sometimes feel the need for actual expertise, sometimes they give preference to vote-seeking. There’s a very unstable balance between these two requirements. (Civil servant, 7 May 2015)

Although the private sector has developed considerably, there is still a high demand for public employment, which favors clientelist mechanisms based on the recommendations from elites. In 2015 for example, in Bastia, which the nationalist Gilles Simeoni won in the previous year, over 300 people applied for 42 positions available for seasonal employees, and according to a staff member, roughly one in six came “recommended.” Since 1982, the decentralization reforms created further opportunities. The two *départements* (*Corse-du-Sud* and *Haute-Corse*) and the region as a whole were granted additional distributive autonomy, whereas all financing demands were submitted *ex ante* to the state prior to 1982, affording multiple opportunities for the exchange of political support for specific favors. As an ex-mayor of one mountainous commune explained:

At that time, you would systematically ask for subsidies at all levels. [. . .] You'd start with the departmental councilor, the mayor of [the county seat], the MP or the president of the Corsican Assembly directly. It's easy to deal with them because everybody knows one another, you campaign together, but they tell you they count on you at the next election and ask you how many votes you'll bring in. (Former mayor, 6 July 2015)

In the classic exchange, the voter who profits from a favor must vote for the source of the benefit, who in turn can ask for “proof” of this support (*bulletin à clef*). That was much easier when ballots were still handwritten (Omessa, 1931). Such intrusive control today, in a more individualistic and liberal society, has more drawbacks than benefits, however, since it undermines the sense of goodwill at the heart of the interpersonal relationship. Despite technological changes, voters remain inclined to reward those who have provided them with benefits (Chang, 2017; Mares & Young, 2018). In Corsica, this culture of reciprocity persists:

My daughter is unemployed, and if a politician—whoever that is—proposes to give something for her to me, I'll of course help him. But that does not mean that I will vote for him the rest of my life. (Civil servant, 2 July 2015)

Municipal employees can also be strongly encouraged to vote for those who hired them:

Last year, we had a bit of a witch hunt [. . .] They exerted pressure on me when my contract was up for renewal. I am not normally involved in politics. I lied by saying that out of sympathies for X [who had hired me], I'd vote for Y [his son], admitting however that Y was a very bad candidate. I found it all very humiliating. (Civil servant, 27 May 2015)

Clientelist exchanges are most often implied, based on the persuasive capacity of the broker who is also usually the mayor of a commune. The smaller the commune, the less it possesses its own public services and the higher its dependence on departmental and regional—that is, decentralized—subsidies. The mayor thus becomes an indispensable “problem-solving agent” (Auyero, 2000) for local citizens, who are positively disposed to comply with his or her solicitations:

It's a convivial relation, not very brutal. Nothing in the exchange is formalized. [. . .]. Mayors of smaller communes are more influential, he'd present things like this: “Look, if we can build this road, it's thanks to them [. . .]”. In this way, he can easily convince 80% of voters to support those who provided the subsidy. (Civil servant, 14 October 2015)

Even if the majority of civil servants were hired before 2001, almost one third of local employees we interviewed admitted to being hired on “political grounds.” Interviewees also highlighted other benefits, particularly before an upcoming election (e.g., permission to use public spaces, career advantages and other “extras”). For example:

At that time, it was important not to be seen badly by the local government, for this could mean the end of your career [. . .]. I know people who are quite brilliant, but who had a miserable career, and mediocre civil servants with wonderful careers that seemed entirely unjustified. (Civil servant, 20 May 2015)

The great majority of such advantages logically go to the most reliable and committed supporters. Nevertheless, elected politicians frequently try to seduce entire families who traditionally voted against them—all the more so since political loyalty is a value much less widespread than it used to be:

The change in the majority has taught me that, in fact, there are no political convictions, you simply go for the highest bidder. People eat from whoever feeds them [. . .]. (Civil servant, 9 July 2015).

Sometimes the goal is merely a *partial* change in the voting behavior, to bring people to vote differently in some elections, but to let them stay faithful to their real preferences in others. Further confirming the weakness of programmatic attachments when material benefits are in the offing, one respondent noted that:

When [X] came to power in 2010, in the first few months, at least four to five families close to [Y] profited from employment in [. . .]. These families certainly voted for [X] in the regional and parliamentary elections, but remained faithful to [Y] in the local elections. (Civil servant, 21 October 2015)

In a clientelist exchange, voters’ loyalty cannot be guaranteed without the establishment of a durable relation that allows them to envision access to future benefits (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016). In Corsica, the search for *swing voters* has been challenging, since some who profited the most early on have reverted to their original positions:

The mayor, from the Left, had a very strong tendency to hire people from families of the Right. That was a grave error. In [. . .] you have [. . .] local civil servants and their vote is decisive when the outcome is tight. As soon as the mayor was somewhat weakened, in 2012, these people voted against him, and

in favor of their original political family, which resulted in his defeat. (Civil servant, 25 May 2018)

### *Alternative Economic Resources and Nationalist Success (2a + 2b)*

Private sector growth in recent decades has severely reduced the power of Corsica's indirect rulers, who have lost their near-monopoly over the creation of wealth and jobs in many communes. Similarly, in Eastern Europe, clientelist practices are less relevant in areas that have experienced rapid economic development, and where the private sector is predominant, such as Poland or the Czech Republic (Kitschelt & Kselman, 2013); on the contrary, they are very important in the poor, rural or mono-industrial regions of Romania or Bulgaria (Bustikova & Corduneanu-Huci, 2017; Cook, 2014).

In Corsica, too, economic development has led to a decline of the power of indirect rulers and the use of clientelistic exchange between politicians and citizens. In turn, this has created opportunities for nationalists:

Along the coast, the private economy—tourism, trade and construction—is more developed, so many people don't need political support anymore. (Civil servant, 31 August 2017)

Development is closely linked to emancipation, that is, where the private sector has thrived the most, Western values have been adopted, notably individualism, which goes against family influence and submissive voting. (Nationalist party activist, 31 August 2017)

The relationship between economic development and clientelism is not necessarily linear, however. In Brazil, for example, salary increases made vote-buying more costly (Lloyd & Borges, 2018). In fact, the transition from low to medium salaries can even lead to more clientelism (Kitschelt & Kselman, 2013). Whereas Corsica is not a country with *very* low salaries, these explanations remain applicable. On the one hand, transitions from low-income to middle-income contexts “are generally characterized by persistent pockets of poverty and underdevelopment, implying that on a purely material basis, many voters will remain responsive to targeted material and professional inducements” (Kitschelt & Kselman, 2013, p. 1461). On the other, “economic uncertainty has an undermining effect on programmatic politics” (Kitschelt & Kselman, 2013, p. 1478), and insular economies such as Corsica's founded almost entirely on tourism are highly dependent on market fluctuations (Hoti et al., 2005).

Second, the power of indirect rulers does not exclusively rely on the exchange of material goods. According to Banfield and Wilson (1963, p. 117), in big American cities, clientelist agents generally offered their voters mere “friendship.” Enquires into Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia and Mexico and elsewhere have also shown that only between 3 and 8% of respondents were involved in clientelist exchanges based on material rewards (González-Ocantos et al., 2014). Similarly, in Corsica, the power of indirect rulers rests on the confidence that ties them to their voters in addition to their ability to provide specific benefits. Thus, interpersonal and affective relationships are crucial:

When there are elections, I’m always campaigning, and then I divide the votes. You have to give this to that candidate, and that to this one [. . .]. You please whomever you can. People you know well, you can tell to vote this or that way. But with some, you have to proceed differently. Even I could not ask them to vote for the Left [. . .] although it would be advantageous for the village. (Right-wing rural mayor, 2 May 2016)

From this perspective, demographic changes are even more likely than economic mutations to affect relations between candidates and voters. As the electorate grows in size, it becomes harder to develop the interpersonal dimension of clientelism, and programmatic policies become a more efficient way of campaigning (Stokes et al., 2013). By contrast, the more a population remains stable, the easier it becomes to know and develop personal relations with voters, which constitutes an advantage for those already in power. Yet, between 1999 and 2018, the island’s population grew by almost 30%—three times the speed of mainland France (11.31%), even though the fertility rate in Corsica is far lower<sup>28</sup>—and this increase was essentially due to citizens from mainland France.<sup>29</sup>

From a culturalist perspective, we would expect that people of non-Corsican origin should be much *less* likely to vote for nationalist parties, which ought to benefit indirect rulers. It does not, however, since indirect rulers lack long-term relationships with new inhabitants. As one interviewee noted:

The arrival of numerous people from the outside has deprived the clan structures of an important mechanism to control decision-making, since the relationship between dominating and dominated, based on the service proved, has been lost in the anonymity of the crowd. (Journalist, 1st March 2017)

Even in small municipalities with stable demographic structures, nationalist parties have gained some ground. Interviewees argued that the decline of

traditionally dominant forces has been spurred by the development of private sector business, but some pointed out that the growth of economic *expectations*, which the old ruling class has been unable to satisfy, has also contributed to the decline of indirect rulers. According to many respondents, nationalist parties offered a clear program for economic and political change.<sup>30</sup> For example,

The nationalists have listened to the problems of the working class, who find it difficult to work and live, and proposed strong solutions. (Civil servant, 31 August 2017)

The traditional powers were bad and have led Corsica into economic non-development which created generations of people depending on social benefits. At the same time, public officials can't give as much anymore as they used to, so voters turn to the only real alternative in Corsica: nationalism. (Municipal councilor, 3 March 2017)

Thus, economic changes were undoubtedly necessary to bring about the freedom to choose politically (municipal councilor, 15 March 2017), and many of those who were most free to choose, thanks to their relative economic independence, voted for nationalists in recent elections. From a purely culturalist perspective, the nationalist idea of defending the culture and identity of Corsicans should have been particularly well received in the rural and mountainous zones of the island, where the population is older and less subject to continental immigration and the impact of the French language.<sup>31</sup> Corsican nationalism has historically had difficulty penetrating these areas, however (De la Calle & Fazi, 2010). Even in 2015, when the nationalists won their first victory, the share of people aged 65+ in a commune was negatively correlated with nationalist party success (Fourquet, 2018, p. 34). Moreover, small rural and mountainous communes were most likely to be hostile to nationalism. To illustrate, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of the 2015 regional elections, the left-wing list—corresponding to one of the traditionally dominant political forces—obtained 28.4% of all votes expressed, but it received more than 70% in 31 municipalities, almost all of which were mountainous and/or had fewer than 200 voters. These communes are less economically dynamic, more dependent upon clientelism and less interested in the nationalist project.

## Conclusion

This article investigated the determinants of nationalism and its relationship to culture, economics and political institutions in Corsica. Whereas, Corsica

presents a most likely site for peripheral nationalism to develop, yet nationalist parties were confined to the sidelines of the island's political life for most of its modern history. Even the decentralization reform of 1982 strengthened the parties already in power and kept nationalist demands in check in many communes.

Although nationalist parties eventually succeeded, especially in recent regional elections, the distribution of the vote suggests that nationalism remained weakest precisely in the areas where it should have been strongest—namely, in the most culturally traditional areas in the interior. To tackle this double puzzle, we conjectured that indirect rule via clientelistic linkages blunts the relationship between cultural identity and nationalism. Moreover, we suggested that indirect rule has weakened and nationalist parties have grown precisely in places where alternative economic resources have become more widely available. In short, cultural distinctiveness *per se* does lead to a greater demand for regional autonomy and to nationalist party success, but only where indirect rulers have been weakened by rival economic opportunities that have unfettered the population to choose.

The evidence supports these contentions. Both the models with survey and census data, as well as the insights gained from interviews, suggest that indirect rule plays a crucial role in understanding why—and especially *where*—nationalism has been able to emerge as a viable political force. Our results indicate that, in areas free from indirect rule, having a larger share of Corsican speakers increases demands for greater autonomy. Moreover, we find that the availability of non-state economic resources, often based on tourism, also independently enhances the demand for more autonomy. We then estimated how the demand for more autonomy translates into the success of nationalist parties, and showed that, in communes where indirect rulers were weak or absent, autonomy demands positively predicted voting for nationalists. Qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into the mechanisms through which political control operates at the local level—through public jobs, subsidies, cajoling and fraud—and how, despite this, nationalists have managed to gain an impressive foothold in many communes.

More generally, this study contributes to a better understanding of nationalist dynamics and territorial politics. Analyzing political behavior at the local government level allows for a fine-grained picture (cf. Lepic, 2017) of how local power structures moderate nationalist politics. The power of indirect rulers depends partly on their privileged access to resources, so it stands to reason that the availability of economic resources outside their control should also shape the demand for the goods they are offering. Such political structures are important and common in many small-scale societies,<sup>32</sup>



especially in relatively deprived peripheries, including parts of Southern Europe and the Caucasus (Heinemann-Grüder, 2013, p. 111).

Even though Corsican culture—measured via the Corsican language as still spoken—has declined, nationalists have gained politically. These gains have been spread out unevenly across the island. This study examines why and how cultural, political and economic factors influence the manifestation of peripheral nationalism in Corsica, and potentially also on a much broader scale, by highlighting a vulnerability of indirect rule as a governing strategy in multicultural societies.

Thinking ahead, since the economic impact of Covid-19 will be the harshest in tourism-dependent areas, one might speculate that indirect rulers could regain strength in subsequent elections. After all, throughout the world, the crisis has also given rise to a general retrenchment of people and politics into their sovereign nation-state borders. Historically speaking, tourism—which we have taken here as the main indicator of private sector development, since it is such a large sector of the Corsican economy—has demonstrably spurred nationalism in Corsica. We do not contend that tourism was the *only* factor, however: renouncing violence and common lists played their part. Yet even the current crisis is unlikely to result in a return to the political economy of the 1950s, when Paris and its indirect rulers controlled almost everything in Corsica. But it is likely to require the nationalist agenda in Corsica to adjust to the new economic situation in order to maintain its current strength.

### **Authors' Note**

Prior versions of this paper were presented at the annual meetings of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, the American Political Science Association, the Western Political Science Association, the European Consortium for Political Research, the European Political Science Association, the American Sociological Association and the Swiss Political Science Association. It was also presented in the Department of Political Science at the University of Copenhagen and at three smaller scale workshops; the first hosted by the NERD (Nationalism and Ethno-religious Dynamics) working group in the School of Politics and Global Studies at ASU, the second by the SWMMR (Southwest Workshop on Mixed Methods Research) at the University of Arizona and the third was a Workshop on Conflict and Cooperation in Colonial and Post-Colonial Societies, hosted by Yale University.

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### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online at the *CPS* website <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0010414020957671>

### Notes

1. Corsican is a separate language, more like Italian than French (Jaffe, 1999), and still spoken across the island with varying levels of intensity and competence (CTC, 2013).
2. Cultural assimilation only emerged as an issue at the end of the 19th century with the introduction of compulsory public education. Nonetheless, the effect was hardly immediate, since even by 1915 to 1919 the transmission rate of Corsican as mother tongue to children aged five was still roughly 85 percent (Aldrich, 2009; Héran et al., 2002).
3. In 1951, the *Loi Deixonne* recognized regional languages and allowed their teaching, but denied them official status. However, the Corsican, Alsatian and

Flemish languages, considered dialects of foreign languages, were unaffected. Corsican was recognized only in 1974.

4. 1982: 13%; 1984: 12%; 1986: 9%; 1992: 25%; 1998: 10%; 1999 & 2004: 17% (Supplemental Appendix 1).
5. Such an alliance had already been formed in 1986, 1992, and 2004, with much less success.
6. Note that De la Calle and Fazi (2010, table 6) measured native Corsicans rather than Corsican speakers.
7. This trend is not unique to Europe (Searcey, 2018; Suso, 2010).
8. In Scotland, the rise of the SNP occurred despite the fact that the prevalence of Scottish national identity has been stable since the late 1990s and only about 1% of the population speaks Gaelic (Bond, 2015). Likewise, the seismic shift from autonomism to independentism in Catalonia was largely a function of the 2010 ruling by the Spanish Constitutional Court and the Great Recession (Boylan, 2015; Mueller, 2019), not of a change in the proportion of people feeling “only Catalan” (CEO, 2018). One plausible explanation is that this decline in the use of regional languages creates group anxieties about the survival of their collective identity, which can foster nationalist sentiments and movements (cf. Fazi, 2020, p. 140).
9. The term indirect rule has also been used to highlight the nature of the institutions governing the sub-unit, *regardless of the social identity of the local authorities* (Fisher, 1991; Lange, 2004). On this view, if these institutions are the same as those used by the central state (or imperial capital), this constitutes direct rule. Alternatively, if central rulers rely on traditional institutions, this is another form of indirect rule. This definition of indirect rule is often favored by writers interested in explaining variation in colonial development (Iyer, 2010 is an exception). Since we are principally interested in the effect of indirect rule on legitimacy and nationalism, we adopt the first definition of indirect rule in this paper. Naseemullah and Staniland (2016) further distinguish between three different forms of indirect rule; the Corsican case corresponds most closely to their discussion of *de jure* indirect rule.
10. In many African colonies, the metropolis installed indirect rulers having little or no legitimacy (Mamdani, 1996). When this occurred, it tended to inspire nationalist reactions. In the absence of a local elite, this form of dependence can also be described as internal colonialism (Hechter, [1975]1998). Iyer’s (2010) study of 19th century India presents persuasive evidence that indirect rulers provided superior governance to that found in directly ruled (British) territories on the subcontinent. In turn, superior governance contributed to higher levels of legitimacy for the indirect rulers.
11. In addition to its economic foundation, the control capacity of indirect rulers is also sustained by a set of interpersonal patron and client relations, which oblige the patron to satisfy (or at least to attempt to satisfy) the particularistic demands of his clients in exchange for their political support (Auyero, 2000; Veenendaal, 2019). Although it is impossible for them to satisfy *all* the demands of their clients, patrons know they play an iterated game and must always appear to

- be willing and able to allocate the desired goods, even when they cannot fully deliver them in the moment.
12. Since 1284, the island had been under Genoese control. The Corsicans revolted against this rule from 1729, and sought to build their own state until the annexation by France in 1769. The life of the Anglo-Corsican Kingdom was even shorter still (1794–6).
  13. In addition to the material dimension of these patron-client relations, where the basic mechanism is promising (or delivering) targeted access to public resources in exchange for future (or past) electoral support, political control consists in extending goodwill, friendship and solidarity to those subject to its rule. This affective side of patron-client relations, involving the exchange of non-material goods, is difficult to observe and measure, but respondents often describe it as crucial to understanding their behavior and often think of it in terms not unlike Graziano's (1976) idea of "instrumental friendship." This governance system is also consistent with Tabellini's (2008) model of cooperation in which clan-based societies have developed very different value systems than modern societies that rely on the abstract rule of law.
  14. The 1982 decentralization greatly reduced the control of the prefect; transferred the departmental-level executive power from the prefect to the president of the departmental council; and created regions, where the executive power is also given to an elected representative. Despite this, according to the Constitutional Council, there was no violation of the Republic's unitary principles. Regional competences are exercised within the framework of national laws and regulations. Corsica, in particular, is already in its fourth special status (1982, 1991, 2002, and 2017).
  15. The law was adopted in 1991, the first executive council was set up in 1992.
  16. While we expect the interaction between indirect rule and cultural identity to be true for both low- and high-resource communes, it should be stronger in economically poorer communes, because they are more dependent on indirect rulers for their livelihood.
  17. See Lenclud (1988) and Briquet (1997) on these points.
  18. The mean sample Standard Deviation for 2+ expert answers on the same commune regarding language is 0.48, for autonomy demands is 0.97 and for indirect rule 0.33. Note, however, that in 63, 65, and 64% of cases, respectively, just one expert assessed a given commune.
  19. See Supplemental Appendix 3 for the names of the sampled communes.
  20. In 2017, the nationalists increased their vote share from 35% to 56%.
  21. When there was more than one expert, we retained the raw scores of the merging process so as not to lose information. By way of a robustness check, however, we also coded anything between and including 0 and 2.4 as low usage of Corsican, and anything higher than 2.5 as high.
  22. When there was more than one expert, we treated values of 0.5 and higher as indicative of its presence. Among the 32 communes with low Corsican culture, 19 have indirect rule (=59%), whereas among the 67 communes with much

- “Corsicanness”, 43 do (=64%). The two measures are anything but correlated (Pearson’s  $r = -0.046$ ), which should alleviate concerns about multicollinearity.
23. The cultural division of labor is related to the concept of ‘horizontal inequalities’ (Cederman et al., 2013).
  24. The same counts for the other controls not shown in Table 1: area, population size, density, age structure and economic sectors. See Supplemental Appendix 5 for models with these controls.
  25. Following Berry et al. (2012), Brambor et al. (2006), and Hainmueller et al. (2019), we also examine the validity of two key assumptions behind the interactions. Supplemental Appendix 6 shows that we can be reasonably confident in both the linearity and common support assumptions.
  26. In Supplemental Appendix 7, we also show this graph for a dichotomized indicator of cultural salience in the commune (more vs. less than 40% Corsican speakers), with the same result.
  27. Obviously, none of this is necessarily unique to Corsica. And although clan control is not carried out in the same manner by all politicians and in all municipalities (cf. Weitz-Shapiro, 2012), we argue that it has a crucial impact on electoral behavior.
  28. 1.37 children/women in 2018, versus 1.84 in mainland France.
  29. French citizens face no restrictions on voting in regional or other election in Corsica.
  30. Nationalists were not the only outsiders to provide a programmatic alternative. But they were the only ones to be able to create and develop a network of personal relationships large and structured enough to replace that of the clans.
  31. The practice of speaking Corsican is strongly correlated with age (CTC, 2013; Moracchini, 2005). Those aged 60+ are much better at speaking Corsican than other age categories.
  32. Other places that are similarly endowed with some of the most-likely conditions for the development of peripheral nationalism include Sicily, Sardinia, Puerto Rico, Guyana and Guadeloupe.

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