

# **Political Autonomy and Independence: Theory and Experimental Evidence**

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October 2006

## **Abstract**

We study the process by which subordinated regions of a country can obtain a more favourable political status. In our theoretical model a dominant and a dominated region first interact through a voting process that can lead to different degrees of autonomy. If this process fails then both regions engage in a costly political conflict which can only lead to the maintenance of the initial subordination of the region in question or to its complete independence. In the subgame-perfect equilibrium the voting process always leads to an intermediate arrangement acceptable for both parts. Hence, the costly political struggle never occurs. In contrast, in our experiments we observe a large amount of fighting involving high material losses, even in a case in which the possibilities for an arrangement without conflict are very salient. In our experimental environment intermediate solutions are feasible and stable, but purely emotional elements prevent them from being reached.