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Only Sentiments: The Impact of Variation in the Scope of Regional Autonomy on National  
Identity in Quebec and the Basque Country

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## **Abstract**

Territorial autonomy is an arrangement under which regions are granted extensive self-government and can take various forms depending on the policies devolved from a central to a regional administration. National identity is often at the forefront of efforts to establish territorial autonomy. This research takes a mixed methods approach to examining the effects of regional autonomy on local policy and national identity, using Quebec and the Basque Country as case studies. This paper analyzes linguistic and social legislation, political party platforms, and survey data on national identity from the two regions between 2018 and 2022 to assess the implications of policy devolution on patterns of identity. This research finds that expanded regional autonomy does not correspond with a greater share of the population expressing a primarily regional identity. These findings suggest that policymakers should prioritize clearly articulating the terms of regional autonomy when establishing systems of territorial self-government.

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## Introduction

From Lombardy to Catalonia and Kashmir to Corsica, regional autonomy has taken on new importance in an age of surging nationalism and civil conflict. As the ability of aspirant states to declare independence and secure recognition has proven limited—as seen by failed independence referenda in Scotland, Catalonia, New Caledonia, and Iraqi Kurdistan—regional pushes for greater autonomy have only intensified since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In countries fractured by internal strife, self-government for culturally and historically distinct regions is often proposed as a path to peace (Schulte 2018; Brancati 2006; Massetti and Schakel 2016). Therefore, if autonomy is to be used as a means for peacemaking, the implications of variation in the scope, or extent of policy and political control, of regional self-rule must be better understood. Doing so is crucial for determining what form of territorial autonomy will yield optimal policy outcomes for regional populations.

At the heart of efforts to secure territorial autonomy is a sense of national identity (Brubaker 1996). The existence of a distinct language, history, and culture is leveraged in calls for greater autonomy, and the policies pursued by autonomous governments are often in service of the national identity around which a self-governing region is created. The once-revolutionary concept of the nation, which Anthony D. Smith defines as grounded in “the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages” and Benedict Anderson describes as “an imagined political community,” has shaped the modern world (Smith 1999, 9; Anderson 2006, 6). Personal attachment to the nation as a source of community and individual identity, according to many scholars of nationalism, imbues the otherwise abstract and arbitrary category of the nation with immense political and cultural power and relevance (Smith 1999, 9).

Territorial autonomy, as a political arrangement and policy mechanism, is characterized by significant structural diversity (Lluch 2012). Arrangements between autonomous areas and their respective central governments vary in terms of the policies under the purview of regional administrations and the depth of political self-rule granted to these governments (Tkacik 2008; Schneider 2003). This range of structural options yields variation in the scope of autonomy. Differences in the powers devolved, or designated, to territorial autonomies by central governments significantly impacts local political affairs and the policies that autonomous governments are capable of implementing (Tkacik 2008; Massetti and Schakel 2016). As a result, subnational governments with different scopes of regional autonomy will adopt varied means of enacting policies prioritizing or privileging a specific national identity. Given the centrality of national identity in the establishment of territorial autonomy, national identity is a crucial factor in understanding the implications of variation in regional policy devolution.

In the Spanish “autonomous community” of the Basque Country and the Canadian province of Quebec, powerful separatist movements have given way to nationalist regional governments. The experiences with territorial autonomy in both regions have significant similarities. Quebec and the Basque Country occupy distinct positions within their respective federations, where their regional governments enjoy greater levels of regional policy devolution than their fellow subnational administrations. The Basque Country and Quebec practically operate as “nations within a nation,” differentiated from their states by linguistic and cultural character (Guibernau 2006). In response to calls for national self-determination from Basque and Québécois nationalists, the Spanish and Canadian federative projects have both evolved to encompass a wide range of devolutionary models (Guibernau 2006, 68). As a result, secessionist currents in Quebec and the Basque Country have largely lost their political relevance, replaced

by deeply popular autonomist movements that have ridden the immense regional salience of linguistic and social issues to electoral success (Lecours 2021). This shift in Basque and Québécois nationalism is largely a product of the constraints on secession imposed by the structures of liberal democracies (Mancini 2008; Lecours 2021).

Despite their similarities, the Basque Country and Quebec can be clearly separated on the basis of their different scopes of regional autonomy. Quebec enjoys a range of devolved powers, delegated by the central government to provincial authorities, distinct from the other nine Canadian provinces, but is not explicitly designated as “autonomous” like the Basque Autonomous Community, whose autonomy is enshrined in the landmark Gernika Statute of 1979. While Quebec enjoys greater self-government than other Canadian provinces, the Basque Country is significantly more autonomous in comparison to both Quebec and other Spanish regions and has even been described by scholars as one of the most autonomous areas of Europe (Cooke and Morgan 1998, 191). Additionally, the positions of both regions within their respective federations have emerged through discrete historical patterns of development (Lecours 2021). The shared characteristics of Basque and Quebec nationalism and federalism, along with their differing levels of regional policy devolution, make these regions ideal case studies for analyzing the impact of variation in the scope of autonomy on national identity.

Utilizing these two case studies, this paper engages in a two-part investigation of the effects of territorial autonomy on regional policy and identity. First, this research asks how variation in the scope of autonomy between Quebec and the Basque Country influences linguistic and social policies from both regions. Next, this paper examines whether differences between language and social legislation adopted in Quebec and the Basque Country correspond with variation in patterns of national identity among residents of the two autonomous regions.

Studying the policy impacts of variation in the scope of autonomy is crucial to expanding understandings of regional autonomy more broadly. Comparative scholarship on the scope of regional autonomy is very limited (Schulte 2018). While there is significant research on the implications of decentralization on regional politics, there is a dearth of literature on the policy implications of variation in the scope of regional self-government. Current scholarship typically examines policy outcomes or political development in different regions within the same state, but cross-national analyses of autonomous politics and policy is largely absent from the literature. By analyzing identity-focused policies passed by the Quebec and Basque regional governments and comparing data on the national identity of residents in the two regions, this research aims to contribute towards bridging this gap in scholarship on autonomy.

This paper employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the relationships between the scope of regional autonomy, linguistic and social policies, and perceptions of national identity in Quebec and the Basque Country. First, legislation and political party platforms from Quebec and the Basque Country, enacted or published between 2018 and 2022, will be qualitatively examined in order to highlight areas of variation between linguistic and social policies and political discussions of national identity from the two regions. This research also includes quantitative analysis of survey data on national identity among residents of Quebec and the Basque Country between 2018 and 2022. This research compares the proportions of respondents from both regions who express their national identity as more aligned with their region or with their country. The change in proportions over time will be analyzed as well to assess the presence of a temporal trend in patterns of national identity. Content analysis and a quantitative examination of survey data are used to explore the ways in which linguistic and social policies



and resident perceptions of national identity differ between the highly self-governing Basque Country, and Quebec, where regional autonomy is narrower.

This research finds that the scope of regional autonomy does not necessarily correlate with increased nationalistic rhetoric and policy measures in regional legislation. This paper also suggests that the proportion of residents identifying primarily with their region over their country is not higher in regions with greater territorial autonomy. These findings challenge the conclusions of existing scholarship on the implications of policy devolution. Critically, this research finds that a narrower scope of territorial autonomy corresponds with increased ideological radicalism among regional nationalist political parties, which in turn is linked to more exclusive and divisive regional policy.

This paper begins with a summary of the histories of Quebec and the Basque Country. Next, a review and analysis of existing literature on autonomy, political decentralization, and Basque and Québécois nationalisms will be presented. The data, research methodology, and limitations of this research will then be reviewed, followed by a presentation and discussion of this paper's major findings. This paper concludes with analysis of the implications of these results, as well as a presentation of policy recommendations informed by this research.

### **History and Background**

Quebec and the Basque Country share a past as hotbeds of separatist political activity. In both regions, the question of political status was not immediately resolved by the introduction of autonomy. Rather, the evolution of autonomy arrangements and regional political landscapes gradually subdued the political viability of secessionism (Lecours 2021). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the issue of independence had largely lost its salience in Quebec and the

Basque Country. Instead, nationalist political parties at the helm of both regional governments turned their efforts to expanding the scope of territorial autonomy and enacting policy agendas aimed at maintaining the dominance of a particular national identity. Discussing the histories of national identity and autonomy in Quebec and the Basque Country is essential for understanding the distinct position that each region occupies within their respective federation, as well as their current political and policy landscapes.

Quebec is the second-most populous Canadian province, and the only one with a majority French-speaking population. Originally one of the most developed and densely populated regions of colonial New France, Quebec came under British control in 1759 following France's defeat in the Seven Years War (Fenwick 1981, 196). During this period of British rule, Quebec's French-speaking majority often clashed with what was widely perceived as English domination over their province. By the establishment of Canadian Confederation in 1867, the notion of a distinctly "French-Canadian" ethnic identity had gained significant traction among the country's French speakers (199). Accordingly, tensions between Francophones and Anglophones in Quebec steadily rose throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to become one of the defining political characteristics of Quebec (196).

Immense popular backlash to the deeply conservative Union Nationale government of Maurice Duplessis, which ruled Quebec from 1936 to 1939 and again from 1944 to 1959, gave way to what historians refer to as the "Quiet Revolution." During this time of sweeping economic modernization, social reform, and changing norms, conceptions of French-Canadian nationhood gradually evolved into a geographically bound Québécois national identity (Lecours 2021, 161; Balthazar 1995, 42). This surge in regional nationalism was accompanied by a spate of political violence committed by the secessionist Front de libération du Québec (FLQ),

culminating in the October Crisis of 1970 (Fenwick 1981, 214). The Quiet Revolution also saw a massive political shift away from autonomism and towards public support for secession from Canada. Under Premier René Lévesque, the first to be elected from the pro-independence Parti Québécois, sweeping language laws, namely the landmark Charter of the French Language, came into effect, codifying the official status of French in the province (Heintzman 1983, 3).

A referendum was held in 1980 on the question of Quebec independence, as promised by Lévesque and the Parti Québécois, which saw secession defeated by an overwhelming margin. However, conflict over the passage of the Constitution Act in 1982, which significantly amended the Canadian Constitution despite Quebec's opposition, began a new period of conflict between the province and Ottawa (Lecours 2021, 163). Under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, the federal government and the Quebec provincial government of Premier Robert Bourassa attempted to redefine Quebec's place in Canada. However, the subsequent Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords of 1987 and 1992, respectively, which aimed to significantly expand provincial self-rule, failed. In 1995, another referendum was held on the question of Quebec's secession from Canada (164). The 1995 vote failed by an incredibly narrow margin, but since that vote, the idea of Quebec independence has become considerably less politically popular (165). In 2018, the autonomist, Québécois nationalist party Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), led by current Premier François Legault, won control of the provincial government. Legault and the CAQ represent the culmination of a decades-long transformation that has seen Québécois nationalists largely abandon outright secessionism in favor of redefining provincial autonomy (169).

The Basque are often referred to as the "oldest surviving ethnic group in Europe" by both scholars and laypeople alike (Ben-Ami 1991, 493). The Basque homeland, known as the Basque Country, straddles the border between Spain and France in the Pyrenees Mountains, and consists

of the modern Basque Autonomous Community and the Chartered Community of Navarre in Spain, as well as the French Basque Country. Today, the Basque Autonomous Community, one of the many autonomous communities of Spain, is often referred to simply as the “Basque Country.” This paper will use that term as well.

During the Middle Ages, the Basque lands were made up of multiple states, the largest and most powerful of which was Navarre. Eventually, Navarre was subsumed by the rapidly expanding Spanish kingdom (Shih 1998, 45). However, Basque regions still possessed significant local autonomy through the *fuero* system, under which the Spanish crown respected the legal traditions of the Basque states (45). However, the end of the Third Carlist War in 1876 brought about the abolition of the *fuero* system, which in turn was a major catalyst for the emergence of Basque nationalism (Ben-Ami 1991, 494). In 1895, Sabino Arana, considered by many to be the founding father of Basque nationalism, established the Basque Nationalist Party (*Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea* in Basque and *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* in Spanish, known today by the bilingual acronym EAJ-PNV). This nascent nationalism promoted the idea that the Basque were a distinct nation with the right to self-determination in their traditional homeland (496).

During the Spanish Civil War, the EAJ-PNV sided with the left-leaning Republicans against Francisco Franco’s right-wing Nationalists, and in 1936 Basque autonomy was established within the Second Spanish Republic (Ben-Ami 1991, 501). This was short-lived, however, and after the victory of Franco’s forces in the Spanish Civil War, Basque nationalists were driven underground under the threat of reprisal. During the Francoist period, public use of the Basque language was prohibited and Basque cultural expression was heavily repressed (501). However, the Francoist suppression of Basque national identity gave Basque nationalism significant popular appeal (Shih 1998, 48). Under Franco, militant Basque nationalist groups

took shape, most notably Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) in 1959. Until the group disbanded in 2018, ETA attacks killed nearly 800 people in total (Lecours 2021, 144).

The transition to democracy in 1978 paved the way for renewed Basque autonomy. Under democratically elected Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez, a new statute of autonomy for the Basque Country was negotiated by nationalist leaders and approved by the Basque public in a 1979 referendum. The Gernika Statute created a regional legislature that controlled regional police, administration, taxation, education, and courts in the Basque Country (Ben-Ami 1991, 510). The ardently secessionist ETA, however, staunchly opposed this autonomy arrangement and urged the group's supporters to boycott the referendum on the Gernika Statute (513). Since the establishment of autonomy, the EAJ-PNV has led the Basque Government almost continuously, with a brief intermission between 2009 and 2012 ("Autonomy Games" 2007). In 2003, the political arm of the ETA, Batasuna, was outlawed for the party's connections to domestic terrorism, temporarily forcing left-wing Basque nationalists out of regional politics (Lecours 2021, 145). Today, EH-Bildu is the primary left-wing Basque nationalist political alliance (149).

Under *lehendakari*, or regional president, Juan José Ibarretxe, the Basque Government pushed to expand its devolved powers. The so-called Ibarretxe Plan proposed a "free association" system between the Basque Country and Spain, with complete regional control over almost all policy areas (Lecours 2021, 146). Although the plan was narrowly approved by the Basque Parliament in 2004, the Spanish parliament refused to even consider the proposal (147). Since the failure of the Ibarretxe Plan, the EAJ-PNV has moderated its approach towards expanding autonomy, with incumbent *lehendakari* Iñigo Urkullu proposing in 2016 that the Spanish Constitution recognize the Basque Country as a "nation."

While the histories of nationalism and federalism in the two regions share many characteristics, the structures of autonomy in the Basque Country and Quebec differ significantly. The Basque Autonomous Community was established by the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country in 1979. This agreement created a system of self-government in the provinces of Biscay, Alava, and Gipuzkoa. The region of Navarre, which is considered part of the traditional Basque homeland, rejected membership in a Basque autonomous region (Shih 1998, 53). The Statute established Basque and Spanish as co-equal languages in the Basque Autonomous Community and describes the Basque Government as serving “The Basque People, or ‘Euskal Herria,’ as an expression of their nationality” (Statute of Autonomy 1979). Through this system, the Basque Country fits into Spain’s officially unitary “state of autonomies,” which many scholars agree is, for all intents and purposes, a federal system (Sala 2014, 110)

Quebec, on the other hand, does not possess a separate constitutional status relative to the other nine provinces. On paper, Quebec maintains an identical relationship with the central government in Ottawa as, for instance, British Columbia or Ontario. In reality, however, the relationship between Quebec and Ottawa is fundamentally distinct. The question of Quebec’s place in the Canadian federation is one of the defining issues of Canadian constitutional theory (Cameron and Jacqueline 2008, 390). Historically, interactions between Quebec and Ottawa have largely been shaped by debates over how to reconcile Quebec’s distinct identity with the broader Canadian federative project. Rather than clarifying the federal-provincial intergovernmental relationship through constitutional reform, an ad-hoc regime of decentralization agreements between Ottawa and Quebec has gradually shaped provincial autonomy (Lecours 2021, 166). While this has, as many scholars and observers note, significantly diminished Québécois separatism as a viable political force, it has also bolstered the popularity of autonomist parties

like the CAQ and created the norm that federal leaders, both Liberal and Conservative, must respect Quebec's jurisdiction (Changfoot and Cullen 2011, 772; Lecours 2021, 168).

The Charter of the French Language and the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, simply known as the "Quebec Charter," form the foundation of a unique political and legal culture in Quebec that distinguishes the province from the rest of Canada (Changfoot and Cullen 2011, 773). Enshrining the centrality of the French language and, through the process of amendments, affirming the existence of a "Quebec nation," the Charter of the French Language is the centerpiece of a concerted policy effort by nationalist Quebec governments to promote Québécois identity. The Quebec Charter, meanwhile, serves as the basis for Quebec civil law, superseded only by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the Canadian Constitution. The quasi-constitutional Quebec Charter has laid the foundation for policy initiatives from provincial governments intended to shape Québécois identity, especially legislation aimed at codifying state secularism (MacDonnell 2016, 510).

The Gernika Statute grants the Basque Government exclusive control over areas including, but not limited to, the structure of regional government institutions, the organization of the Autonomous Police Forces, and the collection of almost all taxes (Gobierno Vasco 1979). In fact, the Basque Government possesses near-total fiscal autonomy from Madrid, levying almost all taxes and determining how revenue is distributed. Due to the unique governance structure of the Basque Autonomous Community, the three provinces of the Basque Country also possess significant levels of internal fiscal autonomy (Lecours 2021, 148). Alongside extensive discretion over matters of regional taxation and finances, unparalleled in Spain, the Basque Country also has the same control of policing, health, and other policy areas held by other Spanish autonomies, such as Catalonia ("Autonomy Games" 2007). Some observers have

referred to the Basque Country as one of the most autonomous regions in Europe, on account of these vast powers (Cooke and Morgan 1998, 191).

Quebec, meanwhile, officially possesses the exact same devolved powers as every other Canadian province. Under the Canadian federal system, each province is responsible for jurisdiction over certain policy areas that solely impact provincial affairs. Areas like taxation, immigration, and agriculture are under the joint purview of the provinces and Ottawa (Cameron and Simeon 2002, 55). Canadian provinces are generally considered incredibly empowered, especially relative to U.S. states (Field 1992, 108). What differentiates Quebec from the other nine provinces is the unique system of asymmetrical federalism that allows Quebec to exercise greater control over local affairs than the other provinces (Cameron and Simeon 2002, 57). Many scholars argue that this was the result of federal attempts to weaken the appeal of Quebec independence by improving the province's status in Canada (Changfoot and Cullen 2011, 772).

This paper asserts that the Basque Country is more autonomous than Quebec. There are multiple ways that the level of territorial decentralization can be quantified. Tkacik (2008) characterizes the scope of regional autonomy as defined by the number of policy areas controlled by a regional government, the regional government's level of control over those areas, and the degree to which the region is territorially insular. Under these conditions, the Basque Government can be said to have a wider scope of regional autonomy than the Quebec provincial government. The policy areas controlled by the Basque Government controls are more extensive than those handled by the Quebec provincial government. The degree to which the Basque Government exercises authority over those policies is more significant than Quebec's control over the province's designated issues. Neither area is particularly isolated, but the Basque Country is constitutionally designated as "autonomous," a status that Quebec does not possess.



A crucial factor in Quebec's distinct, albeit informal, status within Canada is the relative looseness of the Canadian Constitution, which allows for individual provinces to unilaterally amend constitutional provisions that only concern their internal provincial affairs (Lecours 2021, 161). Although Quebec governments have done this in the past, most recently with Bill 96, the ability for Quebec to secure official autonomy has evaded nationalist leaders (161). The difference in official status between the Basque Country and Quebec, as well as the unique depth of Basque autonomy, gives the Basque Government a broader scope of autonomy than Quebec.

### **Literature Review**

Existing literature concerning the question of how the scope of regional autonomy impacts politics and policy in autonomous areas primarily addresses two major themes. First is the idea that decentralization is linked to the strengthening and ideological radicalization of regionalist parties in autonomous areas. Second is the concept that variation in the scope of territorial self-rule has a measurable impact on policy outcomes in self-governing regions. Meanwhile, scholarship exploring how the political affairs and policies of autonomous regions influence perceptions of national identity is sparser. However, research on national identification in Quebec and the Basque Country points to a sense of identity among residents being shaped by the same factors that have influenced the development of nationalism and the structure of autonomy in both regions. Importantly, research that approaches the scope of autonomy through a comparative lens is very limited (Schulte 2018, 86). This indicates the existence of significant gaps in scholarship on autonomy more broadly, as well as the need for further studies to fill spaces in existing literature on the subject.

This section begins by discussing definitions of the “scope of regional autonomy” proposed in the literature. Next, the state of comparative research on variation in regional self-government is examined. This is followed by an analysis of literature on the political and policy impacts of regional decentralization. This section concludes by discussing scholarship on autonomy and national identity in the Basque Country and Quebec.

### Defining the Scope of Regional Autonomy

Many studies pertaining to the range of policy autonomy focus on defining the determinants of the scope of regional autonomy. Michael Tkacik argues that varieties of autonomy are characterized by the number of policy areas controlled by a regional government, the degree of local control exercised over particular issues, and a region’s territorial isolation (Tkacik 2008, 374). Aaron Schneider, meanwhile, defines autonomy as consisting of three dimensions of decentralization: fiscal, administrative, and political (Schneider 2003, 33). Dawn Brancati similarly analyzes levels of self-government by examining whether a regional legislature is democratically elected, what issues that legislature controls, and the role of a regional government in approving constitutional changes (Brancati 2006, 667).

This area of scholarship is generally unified by the notion that the scope of different autonomies is distinguished by a regional government’s level of policy control and the range of issues under the purview of an autonomous administration. The broader a regional government’s jurisdiction, especially over education, policing, and taxation, the greater the degree of territorial self-rule. Under this view of autonomy, a region with a very broad scope of autonomy is an area where an elected, administratively independent regional government exercises the majority of

control over regional fiscal, educational, and internal security policy. Such a region would also wield immense political influence within the wider state as a distinct subnational entity.

Literature defining the characteristics of regional autonomy is crucial for understanding the multiple ways in which the scope of territorial autonomy can differ between regions. From research on factors that make regions more or less autonomous, a framework for differentiating territorial autonomies on the basis of the level of their self-government can be developed. This is of particularly significant value to comparative research on the scope of regional autonomy.

### Comparative Scholarship on the Scope of Territorial Autonomy

Existing comparative scholarship on the scope of regional autonomy is divided on the implications of variation in the level of territorial self-government. Felix Schulte argues that the powers granted to a regional government by an autonomy arrangement is a key determinant of autonomy's success in diffusing or mitigating ethnic conflict (Schulte 2018, 106). Schulte claims that the more expansive a regional system of self-rule, the more likely autonomy is to act as a successful means of conflict reduction in that region (104). Andrea Filippetti and Giovanni Cerulli, meanwhile, find that in European regions with either very low or very high levels of autonomy, local public services are of higher quality (Filippetti and Cerulli 2016, 819).

Examining the causes of variation in the scope of regional autonomy, Nicholas Sambanis and Branko Milanovic, in "Explaining Regional Autonomy Differences in Decentralized Countries," find that wealthier, more equal, more populous, and resource-rich regions tend to have greater levels of policy autonomy (Sambanis and Milanovic 2014, 1848). The authors postulate that the characteristics of areas with greater autonomy enable those regions to extract greater policy independence from their respective central governments (1848). Additionally, in

“Regional Autonomy with Regard to Innovation Policy: A Differentiated Illustration of the European Status Quo,” Elisabeth Baier, Henning Kroll, and Andrea Zenker find that European countries with greater overall levels of regional autonomy tend to have more local control over research and development policy (Baier et al. 2013, 21). Interestingly, however, the authors also contend that this is not the case in all of Europe, with certain states that have significant levels of regional autonomy handling innovation policy at the national level (22).

Literature analyzing the effects of variation in the scope of regional autonomy on policy outcomes indicates that different levels of self-government impact policies in different ways. As this scholarship demonstrates, in multiple policy areas, from security to public services, outcomes often differ depending on whether a region is more or less autonomous. However, this area of research is limited relative to other approaches in the study of autonomy, and there is room for further studies on the implications of variation in territorial self-rule.

### Policy Implications of Decentralization

Scholarship on the impact of decentralization more broadly has found that policy devolution significantly influences regional politics. Brancati, notably, argues that decentralization promotes the growth of regionally-specific political parties (Brancati 2006, 681). According to Brancati, the strength of regional parties in decentralized systems reduces autonomy’s efficacy as a tool for resolving ethnic conflict (681). Similarly, Emanuele Massetti and Arjan H. Schakel find that greater levels of regional self-government are associated with radicalization among regionalist and separatist political parties in decentralized regions (Massetti and Schakel 2016, 68). Massetti and Schakel’s research also finds that regions with a distinct local language are more likely to produce radical regionalist political parties (68).

These crucial pieces of research agree that increased self-rule in linguistically and culturally distinct regions is correlated with an increase in political radicalism and a strengthening of regionalist political parties. Issues of identity are shown by these authors to be deeply linked to questions of autonomy. According to Massetti and Schakel (2016) and Brancati (2006), the more autonomous a culturally unique region, the more politically salient the distinct regional identity becomes. This is manifested in the strength and radicalism of regionalist parties. As Brancati demonstrates, this significantly weakens the peacemaking capabilities of autonomy.

Building on the relationship between autonomy and identity is “Autonomism and Federalism.” Author Jamie Lluç postulates that autonomism, as an ideology that advocates for territorial self-rule as a solution to the problem of the multi-ethnic state, is, somewhat paradoxically, characterized by a rejection of both federalism and secession (Lluç 2012, 154). Lluç argues that autonomism is defined by a strong distrust of federal institutions and a tendency to identify primarily with a distinct region-specific national identity over that of the state to which an autonomous region belongs (153).

These authors demonstrate that the decision to devolve authority to regional subdivisions has significant consequences for the political climate of decentralized areas. The potentially destabilizing effects of decentralization, as shown by Brancati (2006) and Massetti and Schakel (2016) are particularly pronounced in culturally distinct regions. Furthermore, the choice to decentralize power can considerably reshape structures of federalism.

### Regional Autonomy and Nationalism in Quebec and the Basque Country

Focusing on the nature of autonomy in Quebec and the Basque Country, the literature largely views different historical patterns as having significantly impacted regional-federal

intergovernmental relationships in both regions. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that these discrete patterns generated separate approaches to policy development by the Basque and Quebec governments. According to many scholars, Quebec operates within a federal framework that ostensibly promotes cooperation with Ottawa. The Basque Country's relationship with the Spanish central government, meanwhile, is cast as defined by a norm for respecting autonomy.

The seventh chapter of André Lecours' book *Nationalism, Secessionism, and Autonomy* explores the factors contributing to the differences in the nationalist movements of the Basque Country and Quebec. Lecours postulates that in the Basque Country, the violent history of the nationalist struggle fractured the political landscape and impeded the creation of a broad secessionist movement (Lecours 2021, 146). Due to the historical prevalence of separatist militancy, the Basque nationalist movement is viewed as more cautious and having a greater tendency to operate within the bounds of the constitutional system of autonomy (150). Meanwhile, Lecours concludes that Canada's constitutional structure has facilitated greater dynamism in the Quebec nationalist movement by creating a perception that the province's status within Canada is malleable (161). According to Lecours, this has diminished the salience of Quebec separatism while elevating autonomist nationalism as a viable alternative (169).

This perspective of dynamism in the Quebec federal-regional intergovernmental relationship as important for the evolution of Quebec autonomy is shared by much of the relevant literature. Nadine Changfoot and Blair Cullen conclude that the rise of asymmetrical federalism has reduced support for Quebec independence (Changfoot and Cullen 2011, 773). Focusing specifically on the effect of federal financial policy on Quebec and the evolution of Quebec's fiscal federalism, Changfoot and Cullen find that the current federal-provincial relationship grants Quebec enough autonomy to placate the desire for separatism (772). With

regards to national identity, meanwhile, Matthew Mendelsohn argues that the presence of a dual Québécois-Canadian identity among Quebec residents has remained constant between 1970 and 2001, despite turbulence in the relationship between Ottawa and Quebec (Mendelsohn 2002, 89). In fact, Mendelsohn finds that the Meech Lake Accords and 1995 independence referendum are associated with an increase in the sense of attachment to Canada among Quebec residents (89).

Relevant studies of the Basque Country largely reflect the claim in Lecours (2021) that Basque autonomy was significantly shaped by the region's history of violent separatism and the relative rigidity of the Spanish constitutional system. José Manuel Castells and Gurutz Jauregui propose that Basque autonomy, which is distinct in the Spanish context, is the joint product of Madrid's attempts to reduce secessionist militancy and the historical reluctance of Basque nationalists to politically integrate with Spain (Castells and Jauregui 1996, 212). The authors argue that Basque nationalism's distinct strength and violence necessitated an equally distinct response from the Spanish central government, yielding the unique Basque system of autonomy (219). Honing in on the concept of Basque national identity, Thomas C. Davis finds the existence of two Basque identity clusters, which Davis terms the "Active" and the "Non-National" Basque (Davis 1997, 82). The "Active" Basque are portrayed as individuals that view their Basqueness as a separate national identity from Spanish identity, whereas the "Non-National" Basque largely reject the notion of the Basque as a distinct national group (61).

Literature on Quebec (Changfoot and Cullen 2011; Mendelsohn 2002) and the Basque Country (Castells and Jauregui 1996; Davis 1997) share the perspective that distinct historical factors have shaped the structure of autonomy and patterns of national identification in both regions. These forces, namely political violence and constitutional rigidity in the Basque Country and asymmetric, dynamic federalism in Quebec, are characterized as determinants of how

Basque and Quebec residents view their national identities, and how those national identities have changed over time. For instance, Davis cites how Basque people whose identity he categorizes as “Non-National” center their distaste for separatist political violence in their rejection of Basque nationhood. “Active” Basque, meanwhile, are shown to reference the armed struggle for independence as integral to their national identity (Davis 1997). Mendelsohn, meanwhile, mentions how the tangled relationship between the federal and Quebec provincial governments has problematized the notion of identifying as exclusively Québécois or Canadian identity (Mendelsohn 2002, 89). Accordingly, both Changfoot and Cullen (2011) and Castells and Jauregui (1996) focus their respective analyses on dynamic federalism and political violence.

However, current literature on national identification in Quebec and the Basque Country appears to be limited by the lack of relevant scholarship that accounts for the developments of recent decades. Since Mendelsohn (2002) and Davis (1997), two of the most commonly cited articles on their respective subjects, were published, both the Basque Country and Quebec have seen their nationalist movements undergo considerable evolution. Scholarship on national identity in both regions would, therefore, benefit from studies that address recent political shifts.

### **Methods and Data**

To analyze the relationship between the scope of regional autonomy and national identity, this paper compares the Basque Country and Quebec as case studies. This is conducted in two parts: a content analysis of legislation implemented by autonomous governments and political platforms issued by the ruling political parties in both regions, and a quantitative analysis of survey data on national identity collected from both regions. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this paper intends to systematically draw connections between linguistic and



social policies in Quebec and the Basque Country and patterns of national identity in the two regions.

This section begins with an explanation of the qualitative and quantitative data used in this research's content and survey data analyses, respectively. I explain the rationale for the choice of legislation and political statements from each region for content analysis, focusing on the role of those documents in shaping political discourse on national identity in their respective regions. Additionally, I describe the survey data on national identity used in this research and the reasoning behind my selection of these particular datasets. I also outline the sample sizes for the surveys used by this research, as well as the methodologies and questions used by each survey.

This is followed by a presentation of the methods used in this paper's content and quantitative data analyses. This includes a description of the codes and coding methodology used for the analysis of legislation and political party platforms, as well as the quantitative methods with which I examine survey data on national identity from the Basque Country and Quebec. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the data used in this paper, and how those limitations impact this paper's methodology, results, and analysis.

### Qualitative Data

This paper uses content analysis of legislation and political party platforms from Quebec and the Basque Country to explore whether, and how, differences in the scope of territorial autonomy create variation in identity-focused policies from the two regions. For each region, I chose two pieces of legislation and an election platform or speech from the regional governing party for analysis. Through a close examination of major legislation passed by the Quebec National Assembly and the Basque Parliament between 2012 and 2022 and analysis of news

coverage of politics in both regions, four laws proved to be especially impactful. These acts, which focus on regulating language use and other forms of public cultural expression, were chosen for their regional political relevance and centrality to the policy agendas of the governments which passed and implemented them. Policy instruments and political rhetoric are some of the primary means through which political movements advance their causes. Therefore, legislation and political statements can reveal how variation in the scope of autonomy impacts the way that regional governments use political influence and policy to shape national identity.

National identity plays a key role in shaping the policies and politics of autonomous regions. Autonomous governments will often use policy instruments and political rhetoric to promote and protect a particular identity associated with their region and its people (Miley 2014, 305). Typically, this means taking steps to safeguard the most vulnerable, salient, or visible elements of an identity. Such measures include mandating the use of a regionally-specific language in educational settings or requiring the display of nationally-specific symbols in public spaces (Schulte 2018, 90). Therefore, the individual policies and political platforms of nationalist governments in autonomous regions are valuable tools for understanding how the levers of power can be wielded to advance the interests of a particular identity group.

Additionally, the government functions and political climates of administrative subdivisions vary considerably based on their level of autonomy (Tkacik 2008; Massetti and Schakel 2016). For instance, the promises made by political parties during state-wide elections in the United States differ significantly from the platforms for legislative elections in Scotland, where the regional government has far greater powers compared to those of a U.S. state. Differences in the exact language used by legislation and political platforms from two

autonomous regions with differing levels of self-government can thus indicate the specific policy and political impacts of variation in the scope of regional autonomy.

For Quebec, An Act Respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Quebec, more commonly known as “Bill 96,” and An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, or “Bill 21,” were two laws that featured particularly prominently in major Canadian and international news coverage (Austen 2022; Kestler-D'Amours 2019). Bill 96 is a sweeping amendment to the quasi-constitutional Charter of the French Language expanding French’s privileged role over other languages in the province (Assemblée nationale du Québec 2022, 2). Bill 21, meanwhile, strengthens Quebec’s regime of public secularism by prohibiting public employees from wearing religious symbols in the workplace (Assemblée nationale du Québec 2018, 2). These two bills were the subject of immense controversy in both Canada and abroad, with the passage of Bill 96 even provoking an unprecedented statement of concern from the Biden administration (Rolland 2024). Bill 21 was a keystone of the CAQ’s policy agenda during its first term at the helm of the Quebec provincial government and sparked intense backlash from across the Canadian political spectrum for its alleged illiberalism (Kestler-D'Amours 2019). These two laws have, through their controversial nature and stated aim to safeguard a distinct Québécois identity, become emblematic of the unapologetic, strident nationalism of the CAQ-led provincial government.

The two pieces of legislation I chose from the Basque Country are the Normalization of Institutional and Administrative Use of the Official Language (also known as Decree 179/2019) and the Law on Education of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (or Law 17/2023). The Normalization of Use of the Official Language, as its name suggests, expands the use of the Basque language in local government institutions and administration, in order to achieve full linguistic parity between Spanish and Basque in the Basque Country (Gobierno

Vasco 2019, 1). The Law on Education is similarly intended to strengthen the public presence of the Basque language by increasing the number of classroom hours devoted to instruction in Basque (Idiakez, “According to Bildarratz” 2023). Both laws are key policy elements in a broader project of “Euskaldunization,” a term referring to the process of making someone, or something, Basque-speaking (Idiakez, “According to Bildarratz” 2023).

While these two bills did not incite nationwide controversy on the scale of Bills 96 and 21 in Quebec, these language laws have made their way into the heart of political and legal discourse in Spain and the Basque Country surrounding the role of minority languages. In July 2023, portions of the Normalization bill were annulled by Spain’s Constitutional Court, which has final jurisdiction on questions of constitutionality, for disrupting the “linguistic balance” between Spanish and Basque in the Basque Country (Vich 2023). The Law on Education, meanwhile, was entangled in the dynamics of coalition politics between the governing EAJ-PNV and Socialist (PSE) alliance. While it ultimately passed, the law became mired in controversy over the lack of a sweeping majority in favor of the act, which had been promised by advocates of the measure (Idiakez, “The Education Act Gives Birth to Failed Goals” 2023).

For the content analysis of political platforms, I focus on election manifestos issued by the ruling parties in Quebec and the Basque Country, the Coalition Avenir Québec and the Basque Nationalist Party, in the run-up to local legislative elections. The choice of which election platform and election year to analyze boiled down to considerations of relevance and recency. Quebec held elections for the provincial legislature in 2022, which saw the CAQ expand their parliamentary majority from 2018 (Élections Québec 2022). I selected the CAQ’s election manifesto for 2022 due to this election’s role in cementing Legault’s brand of

autonomism as the dominant strain of Québécois nationalism in the provincial government (Onishi 2022).

For the EAJ-PNV, I was unable to find a clear party manifesto for the Basque regional elections held in 2020. Instead, I decided to analyze the speech given by Iñigo Urkullu, the *lehendakari*, or head of government, of the Basque Autonomous Community, at the EAJ-PNV national party assembly in March 2020, ahead of regional elections. Much like the 2022 provincial elections in Quebec, the 2020 Basque elections saw the ruling EAJ-PNV expand their parliamentary majority and further reinforce the political dominance of the party's trademark *jetzale*, or Christian democratic, Basque nationalism (Parker 2020). Due to the impact of these elections, I view these two party platforms as largely indicative of the ideological approach of the ruling political parties in both regions.

I used the DeepL Pro translation platform to translate both pieces of legislation from the Basque Country, which are originally in Spanish, into English. I also used DeepL Pro to translate the CAQ 2022 provincial election manifesto from French into English. I used Google Translate to translate the Basque language portions of Urkullu's March 2020 campaign speech, and DeepL Pro to translate the Spanish passages of the address. Legislation from Quebec is published by the provincial government in both English and French, and thus did not require translation.

### Quantitative Data

The data I used for the quantitative analysis section of this research comes from a collection of individual surveys published between June 2018 and March 2022 that ask respondents from both regions about their national identity. These surveys ask respondents whether they identify: exclusively with their region (Basque or Québécois) over their country,

primarily with their region than with their country, equally with both region and country, primarily with their country, or exclusively with their country (Spanish or Canadian). The overall proportion of responses from each survey and percent change over time in each category are the main parameters for this quantitative analysis. By examining the proportions and the percent change over time in each identity category, this paper seeks to better understand how differences in the scope of autonomy between the two regions are reflected in variation in national identity.

Data on national identity for Quebec comes from the Environics Institute's "Confederation of Tomorrow Survey of Canadians" from 2019, 2020 and 2022, as well as a survey conducted in 2018 by Canadian analytics firm Léger Marketing. The survey reports from the Environics Institute for Survey Research were conducted in partnership with the University of Toronto's Mowat Centre, the Canada West Foundation, Le Centre d'analyse politique - Constitution Fédéralisme (CAP-CF) at the University of Québec in Montreal, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, and St. Francis Xavier University's Brian Mulroney Institute of Government (Environics Institute 2019).

The 2019 national survey, from which this paper sources data on national identity among Quebec residents, was a nationwide survey conducted online between December 14, 2018 and January 16, 2019 with a randomized sample of 5,732 Canadian residents over the age of 18. For Quebec in particular, the sample size for the 2019 survey is 1,021 (Environics Institute 2019). The 2020 national survey was conducted between January 13 and February 20, 2020, with a nationwide randomized sample of 5,152 Canadian residents over the age of 18 and a Quebec sample of 934 (Environics Institute 2020). The 2022 survey was conducted online between January 18 and February 10, 2022, with a randomized sample of 5,461 Canadians over the age of 18 and a Quebec sample of 940 (Environics Institute 2022). The 2018 survey from Léger

Marketing, meanwhile, was conducted online between August 17 and 21, 2018, with a sample of 1,010 Quebec residents over the age of 18.

All three Environics Institute surveys ask respondents the question “Do you consider yourself to be...?” with the choices of: A Canadian only, a Canadian but also (province/territory), equally a Canadian and (province/territory), (province/territory) first but also Canadian, and (province/territory) only (Environics Institute 2022). The Léger survey asks respondents the question “Do you define yourself as...?” with the choices of: Canadian only, Canadian first, as Canadian as Québécois, Québécois first, and Québécois only (Léger 2018).

Data on national identity for the Basque Country, meanwhile, comes from the Sociómetros Vascos surveys published by the Basque Government in June 2018, April 2019, March 2020, and March 2022. These surveys were commissioned by the Basque Government and conducted by Ikertalde, a research group and statistical consultancy firm based in the Basque city of San Sebastián (Sociómetro Vasco 2018).

The June 2018, April 2019, and March 2020 surveys were conducted using questionnaires taken at the homes of respondents across the three provinces of the Basque Autonomous Community. The survey published in March 2022, meanwhile, utilized computer-assisted telephone interviews (Sociómetro Vasco 2022). The June 2018 survey took place from May 8 to 15, 2018, with a randomized sample of 2,313 respondents across the Basque Autonomous Community over the age of 18 (Sociómetro Vasco 2018). The April 2019 survey was carried out between January 29 and February 9, 2019 with a randomized sample of 2,492 respondents over the age of 18 (Sociómetro Vasco 2019). The survey published in March 2020 was conducted from February 18 to 26, 2020, with a randomized sample of 1,750 respondents

over the age of 18 (Sociómetro Vasco 2020). The March 2022 survey was conducted between February 21 and 25, 2022, with a randomized sample size of 3,333 (Sociómetro Vasco 2022).

### Research Methodology

This research uses a mixed-methods approach, with content analysis of legislation and political platforms, and quantitative analysis of survey data on national identity from Quebec and the Basque Country. Content analysis was conducted by qualitatively coding the texts under review to break down the text of the laws, speech, and manifesto into manageable units of analysis, which can then be used to identify common themes and concepts. This research focuses particularly on the presence and frequency of certain phrases and terms in the text of legislation and political statements. The survey data analysis section of this research, meanwhile, compares the different proportions of survey respondents who express their national identity in terms of identification with their region or country. Additionally, this paper examines the yearly percentage change between 2018 and 2022 in how respondents in Quebec and the Basque Country define their individual national identity.

### *Qualitative Methods*

In order to develop the codes and coding categories for this research, I first closely read through the pieces of legislation and the political platform from each region. While doing so, I identified key concepts that appeared regularly in the text of the documents. I pinpointed phrases and terms that correlated with these themes, and categorized passages with that particular language as being associated with those concepts. Ultimately, I narrowed my analysis down to six key themes and ideas, which I then categorized into formal codes. I then coded the texts of



each legislative or political document, pulling quotes that stood out as particularly important or indicative of a specific code. Once each document was fully coded, I then sorted the six codes into two broader coding categories that I found to align with literature on autonomy and nationalism in the two regions. The six codes that I developed for this research are:

“nationhood,” “federalism,” “distinct society,” “defending the nation,” “constitutional mandate,” and “multinational state.” These individual codes are then further grouped into the two larger coding categories of “resistance to the status-quo” and “maintenance of the status-quo.”

The codes of “nationhood,” “distinct society,” and “defending the nation” fall into the “resistance to the status-quo” category. These three codes are indicative of themes that represent opposition to the established regional-federal relationship in either Quebec or the Basque Country. I found that terms, phrases, and passages associated with this coding category express a perception of national identity that is inconsistent or irreconcilable with the identity of the country in which the region is located. The code “nationhood” indicates explicit references to the region in question as a “nation.” For instance, uses of the phrase “Quebec nation” in Quebec legislation or the CAQ’s election manifesto would be marked with this code. “Distinct society,” meanwhile, is ascribed to cases where documents reference the existence of a unique regional society fundamentally different from that of the state as a whole. Similarly, the “defending the nation” code denotes language that alludes to the role of the regional government in protecting the region’s distinct national identity from overreach or neglect by the federal government.

“Federalism,” “constitutional mandate,” and “multinational state” are the three codes that make up the “maintenance of the status quo” coding category. These three codes mark phrases, words, and terms that align with the notion of an autonomous area maintaining its regional identity while remaining part of the state’s administrative and political structure. The code

“federalism” denotes references to the federal-regional intergovernmental relationship as integral to the policymaking process, especially concerning issues relevant to identity, such as language. In a similar vein, the code “constitutional mandate” marks text that alludes to the role of constitutional provisions in legitimizing policies and political action to protect or promote the region’s identity. Finally, the “multinational state” code indicates rhetoric that frames the region’s basic nature as fundamentally defined by the coexistence of regional and state-level identities.

These six codes mark concepts and themes that align closely with the literature on Basque and Québécois nationalism and autonomy, as well as with broader scholarship on nationalism and autonomy. A regionally-specific national identity is framed by many scholars as integral to defining the political climate and policy agenda of an autonomous government (Lluch 2012, 153; Sambanis and Milanovic 2014, 1835). The dynamics of the federal-regional relationship is also described by some authors as a crucial determinant of the policies pursued by autonomous governments (Miley 2014, 303).

### *Quantitative Methods*

The quantitative portion of this research is, broadly, an examination of the overall percentages, as well as the percent changes, in the national identification of residents in Quebec and the Basque Country over time. This paper analyzes the proportion and percent change over time of the Basque Country and Quebec populations that identify exclusively with their region, primarily with their region, equally with both their region and their country, more with their country, or exclusively with their country. This analysis of national identity is restricted to the time period between 2018 and 2022. This was done in order to fully explore the ways in which

these measures of national identity shifted as the policies qualitatively analyzed in the previous section were developed and implemented.

To calculate percent change over time, I first tabulated the percent breakdown of the regional populations by national identity for each year. Next, I calculated the percent change in data from the previous year by taking the difference between the percentage from one year and the percentage for that same measure from the previous year. Once I had calculated and recorded the overall proportions and the percent change from the previous year for each region in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022, I then calculated the difference in the percent change for each year between Quebec and the Basque Country. For each measure of identity (exclusively with region, more with region, equally with region and country, more with country, exclusively with country) I subtracted the percent change from the previous year for the Basque Country from the percent change for Quebec. This process left me with figures for 2019, 2020, and 2022 that represent the difference in the percent change year-on-year between the two regions.

These sets of numbers, as well as the national identity survey data as a whole, form the basis for my examination of the differences in expression of identity between the two regions. The results from this paper's qualitative analysis of legislation and political statements and the historical record of autonomy and national identity's development in the Basque Country and Quebec are triangulated with analysis of survey data to inform the findings of this research. This mixed-methods approach is intended to identify connections between the distinctions in policy direction and political rhetoric caused by differences in the scope of autonomy, and variation in patterns of national identity between Quebec and the Basque Country.

## Limitations

The major limitations of the data for this research comes from the availability of reliable information on national identity for Quebec. While easily accessible and reliable survey data on national identity for the Basque Country could be found through the Basque Government, Canadian federal and provincial statistical agencies do not provide or collect similar data on identity. Therefore, the best sources for data on national identity among Quebec residents were the Environics Institute for Survey Research and Léger Marketing surveys. However, this results in data on Quebec national identity being limited to a shorter timescale than data from the Basque Country. The analysis in this research is thus only able to draw conclusions about national identity in the Basque Country and Quebec over the time frame from 2018 to 2022.

Additionally, the Environics Institute survey data has a gap in 2021, and I was unable to find data on national identity in Quebec for this year from other public sources. The Environics Institute's reports for that year do not include information on national identity. Therefore, the quantitative analysis for this paper does not include a change in percentage from the previous year from 2020 to 2021 for any of the measures of national identity. Rather, the change from the previous year for 2022 is calculated by taking the difference between data from 2022 and 2020. Given this shortcoming in Quebec data, I opted to omit survey data from 2021 from the Basque Country from my dataset in order to ensure consistency in my analysis. Therefore, the percent change from the previous year for 2022 is a percent change over two years for both regions.

Given that the survey data used for both regions come from multiple sources, there is variation in survey methodology that likely impacts the data. For the Basque Country, survey data is collected from a government agency, while for Quebec the data comes from a research institute and a data analytics firm. Additionally, the data from the Basque Country is collected

using a different survey method in 2022 than in 2018, 2019, and 2020. For Quebec, the change in the source of data between 2018 and 2019 from Léger to the Environics Institute means that the survey methodology for the 2018 data is different than for the 2019, 2020, and 2022 data. Given the variation in survey methodology between the two regions, and within each region as well, the findings of this research should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

### **Results and Analysis**

This paper argues that the regional-federal intergovernmental relationship is the element of territorial autonomy that has the greatest influence on patterns of national identity. The Basque Autonomous Community's interactions with the Spanish central government are far more rigid than the relationship between Quebec and Ottawa. This difference in the structure of federalism, this research finds, has led to vastly different approaches to linguistic and social policy between the two regions. In turn, this variation in policy is associated with different patterns of national identification between the two regions. However, this paper does not claim to establish causation between the scope of territorial autonomy and national identity.

This paper finds that the narrower scope of regional autonomy in Quebec corresponds with a higher percentage of residents holding a national identity aligned exclusively or primarily with their region. Additionally, this research draws a connection between the use of nationalistic language in regional legislation and political platforms, and the percentage of residents who primarily identify with their region. Analysis of survey data on national identity in the two regions suggests that the broader and more clearly defined system of Basque autonomy, as opposed to the narrower, more informal autonomous status of Quebec, is linked with greater moderation in political expression and regional linguistic and social policy, as well as a greater prevalence of dual national identities among residents.

Content analysis of legislation and political platforms from Quebec and the Basque Country indicates a clear distinction in how policymakers and political leaders in the two regions approach issues of national identity. Policies on language and state secularism passed by the Coalition Avenir Québec government of Premier François Legault between 2018 and 2022, as well as the CAQ party platform for the 2022 provincial elections, have a high density of language emphasizing the province's nationhood and the historic duty of the provincial government to defend Quebec's distinct cultural character. The text of language and education laws passed by the Basque Government over the same time period, and a 2020 speech given by regional leader Iñigo Urkullu, meanwhile, has a higher frequency of language referencing the Basque Autonomous Community's nature as part of a multinational Spanish state.

Quantitative analysis of survey data on national identity in Quebec and the Basque Country, meanwhile, finds that Quebec residents are more likely to identify exclusively or primarily with their region, while identifying equally with one's region and country is more common among respondents from the Basque Country. The percentage of respondents in Quebec whose national identity can be defined as only or primarily Québécois is consistently higher between 2018 and 2022 than the percentage of respondents from the Basque Country whose national identity is characterized as primarily or exclusively Basque. Additionally, the percentage of respondents from the Basque Country identifying as equally Basque and Spanish is reliably higher than the percentage of Quebec respondents who identify equally as Québécois and Canadian. Finally, the percent change in all categories of national identity over time is far higher in both directions for Quebec than for the Basque Country.

This section begins by summarizing two major themes uncovered by content analysis. Next, the findings from this paper's analysis of survey data are summarized. This section

concludes with a discussion of how the results from the quantitative and qualitative approaches of this research align and inform the paper's conclusions.

### Content Analysis

Broadly, content analysis of legislation and political platforms from Quebec and the Basque Country reveals stark distinctions in the rhetorical approach towards discussions of national identity between the two regions. Quebec legislation and the CAQ party platform has a far greater density of language aligning with the “resistance to the status quo” coding category. Laws from the Basque Country and *lehendakari* Urkullu's 2020 speech, meanwhile, have significantly more instances of language that code as belonging to the “maintenance of the status-quo” category. Themes of defending regional nationhood and safeguarding societal distinctiveness are prevalent throughout the text of Bill 96, Bill 21, and the CAQ 2022 election manifesto. The Normalization of Use of Official Languages, Law on Education, and Iñigo Urkullu's 2020 campaign speech, however, appear to focus more on ideas of federalism and the compatibility of state structures with a unique Basque regional identity.

Crucially, Quebec legislation makes considerably more frequent and direct references to the status of the province as a “nation” and the role of policy in affirming the region's “nationhood” than similar bills adopted in the Basque Country. On the other hand, legislation from the Basque Country appears to view the role of similar policies as fulfilling the terms of a regional-federal agreement. Policy to expand the use of the Basque language is discussed in the text of legislation in terms of achieving the established aims of the autonomous government. Furthermore, the political platform and legislation from Quebec are more likely than the Basque

speech and laws to describe their respective regional society as possessing a “distinct” cultural, political, and historical character relative to that of the state as a whole.

The following discussion of this paper’s qualitative results will focus on two overarching themes revealed by content analysis. First is the idea that the autonomous government has a “mandate” to advance the interests of their region's national identity. In legislation passed by the Basque Parliament and in a speech given by the leader of the Basque Autonomous Community in 2020, the idea that the Basque Government was given a mandate by the Gernika Statute to enhance the public role of the Basque language is a common theme. In legislation adopted by the National Assembly of Quebec and the 2022 election manifesto of the province’s governing party, however, there is a pattern of describing the provincial government as having a “special historical responsibility” not grounded in law to promote and defend Québécois identity.

The second major theme discussed in this section is the difference in how the documents from the two regions describe the concept of “nationhood” and the autonomous region’s status as a “nation.” In Quebec laws and the CAQ election platform, references to Quebec as a “nation” and “distinct society” are practically ubiquitous. However, direct mentions of Basque nationhood are far less common in the legislation from the Basque Country analyzed for this research. Iñigo Urkullu’s speech in 2020, however, demonstrates how references to the Basque “nation” are still present in political contexts, albeit differently than in discussions of Quebec nationhood.

These findings broadly suggest that the characteristic of the scope of regional autonomy that contributes the most to variation in linguistic and other cultural and social policies between Quebec and the Basque Country is the regional-federal intergovernmental relationship. The distinctions in language surrounding the idea of a “special responsibility” and the “nation” are deeply linked to federalism and interactions between the regional and central governments.



Historical patterns of development in territorial autonomy that have shaped the state of the Quebec and Basque regional-federal relationships are accordingly reflected in the rhetorical themes and policies analyzed in this section.

*Protecting the Nation and the Constitutional Mandate*

Legislation from Quebec has a high density of text that codes as “protecting the nation,” while laws from the Basque Country include multiple instances of language that aligns with the “constitutional mandate” and “federalism” codes. The frequency of these codes in legislation indicates two distinct approaches towards discussions of the regional-federal intergovernmental relationship. Interactions between regional and central governments significantly shape the policy agendas and approaches of autonomous areas. Language and policy provisions concerning this intergovernmental relationship in legislation passed by the Quebec and Basque governments can be used to analyze potential differences in policy associated with variation in the scope of regional autonomy. Differences between federalism in Quebec and the Basque Country appear to be reflected in the ways that laws and political speech in the two regions treat the policy implications of intergovernmental relations. In turn, these distinctions can demonstrate how federalism, a key factor differentiating the scope of regional autonomy between the regions, impacts identity-focused policies.

Basque legislation frames efforts to advance Basque national interests as fitting into the framework created by the 1979 Basque Statute of Autonomy. The provisions of the Normalization of Use of Official Languages bill and the Law on Education are cast as being in full accord with the constitutional structure of Basque autonomy. The text of the Normalization decree, for instance, describes the bill as fulfilling the mandate of the Gernika

Statute, stating in the preamble that the Statute “...proclaims the character of Basque as its own and official language in the Autonomous Community of Euskadi and the right of all people to know and use both official languages,” in order to “...create the conditions that allow for full equality of the two languages” (Gobierno Vasco 2019, 1). Linguistic normalization, which is intended to expand the presence of the Basque language in local government, is positioned as necessary to fully realize the Statute’s goal of linguistic parity. Policy that aims to strengthen a core element of Basque national identity and ensure the region’s distinctiveness from the rest of Spain is thus, through the invocation of the Gernika Statute, portrayed as a tool of federalism.

Similar laws and political platforms from Quebec, meanwhile, take a more confrontational approach to the federal-provincial relationship. Policies bolstering the French language’s role in the public sphere are framed as being directly at odds with the Canadian government. For instance, the text of Bill 96 states that “...it is incumbent on the Parliament of Quebec to confirm the status of French as the official language and the common language and to enshrine the paramountcy of that status in Quebec’s legal order” (Assemblée nationale du Québec 2022, 7). The use of this language portrays the landmark language law as an example of the provincial government taking unilateral action to defend Québécois identity. This rhetoric can be interpreted as asserting that Quebec has a distinct character from the other Canadian provinces on account of its French-speaking majority, which thus grants the provincial government a unique jurisdiction over linguistic policy.

Similarly, according to the Coalition Avenir Québec’s 2022 election manifesto, although the provincial government intends to “...work constructively within the Canadian federation...above all it will pursue its quest for recognition and political and economic autonomy for Quebec” (Coalition Avenir Québec 2022, 46). With regards to immigration, the

party claims that “The time has come for Ottawa to accept that Quebec should have all the powers necessary to welcome and integrate its immigrants” (47). Through Bill 96 and the CAQ’s platform, the provincial government appears to claim that it is acting decisively to safeguard Québécois nationhood, even if it comes at the expense of operating within the bounds of the Canadian federal system. Policy to advance Québécois national interests and identity are thus positioned as requiring significant deviation from the established Canadian federal order.

While the Basque Government positions linguistic nationalism as part of the Spanish system of autonomy, language laws in Quebec are framed as opposing Ottawa’s the policy agenda, in pursuit of a “...political project...based on loyalty to Quebec” (46). Interestingly, in both cases, the language used in legislation and political statements casts the two administrations as fulfilling their respective governing mandates. For Quebec, the text of Bill 96, Bill 21, and the CAQ 2022 provincial election platform appear to task the provincial administration and the province’s ruling party with protecting the “Quebec nation,” the defining aspect of which is the French language. While the Basque Government is portrayed as meeting a formal, constitutionally delineated requirement through its linguistic nationalism, Quebec’s provincial government is described as fulfilling a more informally defined mandate through its policies.

Passages and clauses referencing Quebec’s obligation to defend the use of French and other distinct elements of Québécois culture are prevalent in Bills 96 and 21. For instance, Bill 96 amends the Charter of the French Language to add “Whereas Quebec is the only French-speaking State in North America and shares a long history with the francophone and Acadian communities of Canada, and whereas that confers a special responsibility on Quebec” (7). Quebec, given its cultural character, is positioned by this portion of the bill’s text as having been endowed with the duty to protect French. This “special responsibility” is used to rationalize the

linguistic nationalism that Bill 96 enforces, such as mandating the use of French in civil administration and in court (2). In asserting this “special responsibility,” the authors of Bill 96 suggest that Quebec has special rights beyond those held by the other provinces by virtue of Quebec’s cultural character, differentiating the province from the rest of Canada.

In this regard, Bill 21 includes language similar to that of Bill 96. In Bill 21, the pattern of describing legislation as falling within the provincial government’s duty to protect Québécois national identity also appears. The preamble to the law states that “...it is incumbent on the Parliament of Quebec to determine the principles according to which and manner in which relations between the State and religions are to be governed in Quebec,” given that “the Quebec nation has its own characteristics, one of which is its civil law tradition, distinct social values and a specific history that have led it to develop a particular attachment to State laicity” (Assemblée nationale du Québec 2019, 5). The themes seen in this legislation suggest that provincial law flows from an inherent responsibility to defend Quebec’s identity, rather than from legal sources.

This theme of a “special responsibility” is present in the CAQ’s 2022 election platform as well. Directly echoing the language of Bill 21 and Bill 96, the manifesto’s section on identity states that Quebec’s government has “...a special historical responsibility: to protect and promote the French language, its culture, its civil law legal system, its own institutions and the secular nature of the Quebec state” (Coalition Avenir Québec 2022, 46). The CAQ government promises to exercise this responsibility, according to the party platform, through seeking “More autonomy, more power” and “...recognition and political and economic authority for Quebec” (46). Additionally, the section of Bill 96 amending the Constitution Act, 1867 to explicitly describe Quebec as a “nation” is referred to by the CAQ platform as part of the province’s “...special responsibility for the survival of the French language in North America” (16). This rhetoric

indicates that CAQ leadership views policies that safeguard Québécois national identity as necessitating unilateral action. From this perspective, greater separation from, rather than increased cooperation with Canada is required to advance Quebec's interests.

In the legislation and speech from the Basque Country, the theme of the autonomous government's mandate to defend the region's national identity is approached in a fundamentally different way. The Normalization bill describes the law's relationship to the Gernika Statute by stating that "This duty or mandate of general standardization that the Statute includes constitutes a binding legal criterion for those who legislate and for all public authorities" (Gobierno Vasco 2019, 1). The act's introductory comments additionally directly reference Spain's 1978 Constitution, stating that "The second paragraph of the same article [of the Constitution] foresees that the other languages are also official in the respective autonomous communities, containing a referral in favor of the statutes of autonomy for the purpose of specifying the official status of these languages" (1). In comparison to the rhetoric of Quebec policymakers, the duty of the Basque Government to expand the Basque language's presence in local administration is derived from legal doctrine, rather than a loosely defined "special responsibility." Policies that strengthen the visibility of the Basque language are positioned as compatible with the Spanish federal system. Protecting a distinct Basque cultural identity is thus viewed as being made possible through collaboration, rather than conflict, with Madrid.

The Law on Education similarly references the Gernika Statute in the bill's explanatory comments, claiming "The present Law is passed on the basis of the competence in the field of education which Article 16 of the Statute of Autonomy of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, in accordance with the first provision of the Constitution, recognizes to the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country" (Gobierno Vasco 2023, 3). The invocation of

the Statute and the Constitution further alludes to a view that Basque Government's linguistic nationalism fits into the constitutionally ordained structure of regional self-government. The presence of a measure in the Statute directly authorizing the Basque Government to enact its own educational laws gives the EAJ-PNV government a justification to legitimize a policy of linguistic nationalism while remaining within the bounds of the autonomy arrangement.

In his speech at an EAJ-PNV campaign event in the buildup to the 2020 regional elections, Basque leader Iñigo Urkullu strikes a slightly more confrontational tone. Urkullu calls for an expansion of the Basque Government's powers, or "...a new model of state that recognizes the national identity of Euskadi and the uniqueness of our central government" (Urkullu 2020, 3). This call for expanded autonomy is, however, framed as a directive to "...fulfill the Statute of Gernika in its entirety" (3). Pledges that Urkullu makes to "deepen the self-government" of the Basque Country revolve around agreements with the Spanish government that fit into the Statute of Autonomy and the constitutional structure of autonomy (3). For instance, he promises to seek an "...updated economic agreement and new quota law," while also lauding agreements made with Madrid to expand high-speed rail access to the region (3). Accepting and maintaining the intergovernmental relationship appear to be at the forefront of Urkullu's discussions of the EAJ-PNV's policy agenda, even when calling for a re-examination of the autonomy system.

The textual patterns from both regions with regards to the regional-federal relationship appear to demonstrate a difference in the policy approach towards balancing the interests of the autonomous region with those of their respective federal government. The prevalence of the "constitutional mandate" and "federalism" codes in the text of Basque legislation and Urkullu's 2020 speech suggests that the Basque Government considers policy protecting Basque national identity as compatible with the region's membership in the Spanish federation. The density of

language that codes as “protecting the nation” in Quebec documents, meanwhile, indicates a more confrontational bent to the way the province approaches the compatibility of Canadian and Québécois national identities. Focus on the province’s “special responsibility” to defend Québécois nationhood can be interpreted as asserting that Québécois and Canadian national identities are irreconcilable, by framing efforts to protect Québécois culture and society as necessitating greater separation between the province and Canada.

This regional variation in how legislation and political platforms approach the government’s responsibility to protect the nation fits into a greater theme that this research finds: the role of formal structures and the intergovernmental relationship in impacting linguistic and social policies. In the Basque Country, regional autonomy is grounded in a Statute of Autonomy approved by both the Spanish Parliament and the Basque public in a referendum, in line with provisions of the 1978 Spanish Constitution (Keating 2018). Legislation like the Normalization of Use of Official Languages and Law on Education derive their legitimacy from the powers allocated to the Basque Government by the Statute. The Statute clearly outlines the realms where the Basque Government’s policies take precedence over Madrid’s. For instance, Article 10 of the Statute describes areas where the Basque Government has sole jurisdiction, while Article 6 dictates the legal status of the Basque language in the region (Gobierno Vasco 1979, 2-3).

In Quebec, however, structures of self-government are significantly less formalized. Alongside having a narrower scope of autonomy, the Quebec provincial government’s relationship with the Canadian federal government is not governed by a formal document beyond the 1867 and 1982 Constitution Acts. Although Quebec’s federalism has a fundamentally different dynamic than seen in other Canadian provinces, the special nature of this relationship is not officially recognized. Attempts at clarifying Quebec’s place in the Canadian federation,

namely the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, ended in failure (Balthazar 1995, 51). Instead of a constitutionally defined system to regulate the relationship between Quebec and Ottawa, the system that has ultimately emerged treats Quebec informally as a distinct entity within the Canadian state, but legally considers it a province like any other (Lecours 2021, 169).

Where the Basque Government takes the Gernika Statute as an affirmation of the Basque identity's ability to coexist with Spanish nationhood, Quebec's understanding of its autonomy appears to promote defensiveness in the approach to balancing Quebec's national interests with those of Canada. The Basque Statute provides a guarantee that Basque and Spanish identities and national interests are co-equal in the region, whereas no such constitutional promise exists for Quebec. As such, Quebec politicians and lawmakers seem to focus on how the provincial government can act unilaterally to protect Quebec identity, while Basque nationalist leaders appear to emphasize cooperating with Madrid, in line with legal frameworks. Where policies safeguarding Basque culture are considered items for bilateral action, Quebec politicians seem to prefer describing their agenda as being "Quebec first." These different perspectives on the relationship between federalism and issues of national identity suggest that Quebec leaders view their policy agenda as a rejection of Canadian institutions, while Basque policymakers approach linguistic and social legislation as fully compatible with the Spanish system of autonomies.

### *Nationhood and National Distinctiveness*

A significant difference between the text of political platforms and legislation from Quebec and the Basque Country is the discussion of nationhood. Bill 21, Bill 96, and the CAQ platform all describe Quebec as "the Quebec nation" and a "distinct society," and there are many instances of language that code as belonging to the "nationhood" and "distinct society"



categories in the text of these documents. For the Basque Country, meanwhile, direct mentions of Basque nationhood are less common. Instead, text that falls into the “multinational state” category is prevalent across the Normalization of Use of Official Languages, the Law on Education, and Urkullu’s 2020 speech. This suggests differing views between the two governments on the place of their regions within their respective federations.

The text of Bill 96 makes nine direct mentions of Quebec as a “nation.” Additionally, Bill 96 makes multiple references to that law’s role in preserving a “distinct” Québécois culture. Passages with such phrasing often also reference the “Quebec nation.” For instance, Bill 96 amends the Charter of the French Language by adding the passage “French is also the common language of the Quebec nation and constitutes one of the foundations of its identity and distinct culture” (Assemblée nationale du Québec 2022, 7). Additionally, the law inserts into the Charter the statement that “French is, among other things...the language that makes it possible to embrace and contribute to the Quebec nation’s distinct culture” (39). These examples of text emphasizing that Quebec is a “nation” with a “distinct culture” suggest that Quebec policymakers view the province as having a societal character separate from that of Canada.

Through these passages, the drafters of Bill 96 claim that Québécois nationhood is fundamentally characterized by the trait that differentiates the province most significantly from the rest of Canada: the French language. Bill 96 amends the preamble of the Charter of the French Language to include the passage “Whereas the National Assembly recognizes that French is the common language of the Quebec nation and that it is essential that all be aware of the importance of the importance of the French language and Quebec culture as elements that bind society together” (Assemblée nationale du Québec 2022, 7). Bill 96 also adds to the Charter’s preamble that “French is the only official language of Quebec and the common language of the

Quebec nation and the language of integration into the Quebec nation” (7). The Bill also amends the Constitution Act, 1867 to state that one of the “Fundamental characteristics of Quebec” is that “Quebecers [Québécois] form a nation” (84). Given that Quebec is the only French-speaking Canadian province, the implication of adding these passages to the Charter and Constitution Act appears to be that Québécois nationhood is distinct from Canadian national identity.

This is consistent with Bill 21, which includes in its preamble that “the Quebec nation has its own characteristics, one of which is its civil law tradition, distinct social values and a specific history that have led it to develop a particular attachment to State laicity” (Assemblée nationale du Québec 2019, 5). The text of the legislation frames policies prohibiting public displays of religious symbols by government employees as serving the interests of a Quebec nation.

According to the text of the act’s preamble, “...the Quebec nation considers State laicity to be of fundamental importance” (5). Bill 21, strikingly, also states that “The Act has effect despite certain provisions of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution Act, 1982” (3). While the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms is a Quebec provincial law, by bypassing sections of the Constitution Act, 1982, Bill 21 seemingly demonstrates that state laicity, a “fundamental” element of Quebec national identity, is so incompatible with federal law that it conflicts with the Canadian Constitution. The implication of this seems to be that the foundations of Québécois and Canadian national identities are inherently at odds.

The Coalition Avenir Québec’s 2022 provincial election platform, meanwhile, practically revolves around the notion of Quebec as a “nation.” Premier Legault’s opening message in the platform refers to Quebec as “our nation” when discussing the province’s economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and promises to “continue serving the Quebec nation” in a second term as premier (Coalition Avenir Québec 2022, 3). This is the case throughout the platform,

with regular references to how the party's program of "economic nationalism" aims to make Quebec a "wealthier nation," and how the CAQ's broadband access policies have made Quebec "one of the world's most connected nations" (20-21). Policy areas like culture are framed as explicitly national. Policy supporting Quebec's artists is, for instance, described as "...a very important identity issue for a nation like ours," because "Developing new audiences is essential to the survival of our culture" (48).

When directly addressing the issue of national character, the party platform discusses the topic in nationalistic terms, stating that "Quebec's national identity is rooted in our shared history, culture, and language. This is what makes us proud as a people" (46). The idea of Quebec nationhood is cast by the party as being at the forefront of the provincial government's policy agenda, stating that "...it's the foundation on which a CAQ government will base its actions to enable Quebec to achieve its great ambitions" (46). Bill 96 is celebrated by the CAQ, which describes the law as "...enabling the Quebec nation to continue to express its identity and share it proudly" (47). The elevation of Québécois national identity is unmistakably cast by the CAQ through its election platform as being one of the government's primary objectives.

Legislation and political statements from the Basque Country, on the other hand, are considerably less vocal about national identity and nationhood's role in shaping the government's agenda. The text of the Normalization bill acknowledges the Basque language as being especially important to the Basque Country's identity, stating that "The Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country, for its part, proclaims the character of Basque as its own and official language in the Autonomous Community of Euskadi" (Gobierno Vasco 2019, 1). However, this passage discusses the importance of the Basque language in terms of bilingualism, continuing on to state that the Statute ensures "...the right of all people to know and use both

official languages” (1). Additionally, while Bill 96 is discussed by the CAQ and the text of the legislation itself as upholding Quebec nationhood, the Normalization law is instead described as being part of “...a linguistic policy for the recovery of Basque, which seeks a situation of full normality of use, which respects and guarantees the linguistic rights of citizens, and which ensures for Basque a status of equality and parity with respect to the other official language” (2).

The Law on Education takes a similar approach to the issue of national identity, stating that “...the Statute of Gernika establishes in Article 6 that Basque is the language of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and that both Spanish and Basque are official languages” (Gobierno Vasco 2023, 2). Compared to the Normalization decree, this law focuses more on the Basque language’s importance to the region’s national identity and classifies the Basque language as “...Basque and Basque culture as instruments of identity, expression and coexistence,” but with the addendum that the role of language as an element of identity exists “...also with other languages” (5).

These passages align with the “multinational state” code, as they emphasize the value of the coexistence between two or more national identities within the autonomous region. This is more explicitly stated by the text of the legislation when it claims that “...this Autonomous Community also has its own cultural characteristics, which the educational system must take into account, and two official languages which it must contribute to develop” (3). The approach seemingly taken by this legislation is that the Basque nation, while granted autonomy and self-determination in the Basque Country by the Statute of Gernika, does not legally have cultural hegemony in the region. Rather, multiple cultures must be balanced.

*Lehendakari* Urkullu’s speech at a 2020 EAJ-PNV campaign event diverges slightly from the rhetoric and tone of the Basque legislation on language and education. During the speech,

Urkullu regularly references the Basque Country and its people as a “nation.” For instance, he describes the party’s policy agenda as one of “national construction” and “preserving our Basque identity” (Urkullu 2020, 5). His call for reforms to Basque autonomy includes the promise that his government will “...propose a new model of state that recognizes the national reality of Euskadi,” and claims that the EAJ-PNV is dedicated to making the Basque Country “a nation that is capable of guaranteeing its identity” (3; 6). Most strikingly, his speech closes with the cry “Gora Euskadi Askatuta,” which roughly translates to “long live a free Basque Country,” a common Basque nationalist slogan (6). The tone of Urkullu’s speech differs considerably from the language of the Normalization of Use of Official Languages and the Law on Education. The two pieces of legislation make no mention of the Basque Country as a “nation” or a society defined exclusively by Basque language and culture.

The use of overtly nationalistic rhetoric by Urkullu, however, can potentially be attributed to the setting in which he was speaking, as well as the historical patterns of Basque nationalism’s development. The event Urkullu addressed in 2020 was a flagship rally for the EAJ-PNV, which is an explicitly Basque nationalist political party. During the nearly uninterrupted period of EAJ-PNV leadership in the Basque Country since 1979, EAJ-PNV leaders have made multiple efforts to expand regional autonomy (Lecours 2021, 144). However, these attempts at increasing Basque autonomy, namely the Ibarretxe Plan in 2000, failed. Under Urkullu’s leadership, plans for greater regional self-government have, at least ostensibly, respected the limits set by the Statute (150).

Furthermore, the EAJ-PNV has a track record of what scholar André Lecours describes as a “...position on the political future of the Basque Country in the democratic period” that has largely been “...ambiguous and changing depending on the circumstances” (145). The EAJ-PNV

is considered a centrist force in the Basque political landscape, taking a less radical stance than parties like Batasuna, which was outlawed in 2003 for alleged links to terrorism (145).

Additionally, Lecours points out that the history of intense political violence in the Basque Country, spearheaded by the separatist Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA), made overt separatism of the variety seen in Quebec, for instance, less politically viable (146). These historical dynamics created a political climate where opponents of Basque independence were significantly more severe in their objections to separatism than in other autonomous regions (146). Due to these factors, scholars like Lecours conclude that Basque nationalists have become more willing to accept the Statute and the Basque Country's place as an integral part of the Spanish state (147). However, the EAJ-PNV is still nationalist and as seen by Urkullu's speech, this nationalism is exercised through the mission of expanding Basque autonomy within the Statute's boundaries.

In Quebec, however, the trajectory taken by the nationalist movement that ultimately gave rise to the CAQ was fundamentally different from that of the Basque nationalists. Two failed secession referenda in 1980 and 1995 largely ended dreams of an independent French-Canadian state, and instead Québécois nationalist provincial governments turned their focus towards expanding provincial autonomy (Changfoot and Cullen 2011, 770). The death of separatism as a viable political project in Quebec, however, empowered political parties and leaders who rejected independence yet advocated for a more fervently nationalist vision of the province's future. Lecours argues that the constant evolution of Quebec autonomy imbues the system with a sense of dynamism (Lecours 2021, 169). The constantly evolving state of Quebec autonomy and nationalism, which lacks the constraints of history and constitutional structure seen in the Basque Country, has led to more overtly nationalist policy and political expression from the provincial government.

The frequency of legislative and political language referring to Quebec as a “nation” with a “distinct culture,” and the comparative lack of such rhetoric in documents from the Basque Country, indicates a significant contrast in how questions of national identity are approached by the governments of the two regions. This key difference in discussions of nationhood also suggests the existence of distinct perspectives towards reconciling the presence of multiple national identities with the unique cultural character of the two regions. In Quebec, conceptions of national identity appear more exclusive than in the Basque Country, where acceptance of a multinational identity by policymakers seems to be more prevalent.

### Survey Data Analysis

The analysis of survey data on national identity in the Basque Country and Quebec from 2018 and 2022 reveals that Quebec residents are more likely than their Basque counterparts to identify primarily with their region than with their country. Additionally, Basque respondents are more likely than those in Quebec to identify equally with their region and their country. The comparison of survey data also shows that respondents from both regions are unlikely to identify themselves primarily or exclusively with their respective countries. Over time, there is greater variation in the national identification of Quebec residents than is present in the data from the Basque Country. The yearly percent changes in Quebec survey data for 2019, 2020, and 2022 are larger than for the same years according to Basque Country data.

Quebec has a greater proportion of respondents who reliably identify exclusively or primarily with their region (Quebec or the Basque Country) rather than with their country (Canada or Spain). In 2018, 39% of Quebec residents claimed that they identified more with their region, compared to 41% of Basque respondents. In 2019, 61% of Quebec respondents and

44% of Basque respondents answered that they identified with their region over their country. For 2020 the breakdown was 48% of Quebec respondents and 42% of Basque respondents, and for 2022, the results were 59% of Quebec residents and 45% of Basque respondents identifying more with their region over their country. 2018 is an outlier from the rest of the data, which can potentially be attributed to the different source of the statistics. In 2019, 2020, and 2022 a greater proportion of Quebec respondents identified as exclusively or primarily Québécois than the proportion of Basque Country respondents who identify only or mostly as Basque. This indicates that a greater segment of Quebec's population views their national identity as connected to their region in particular, whereas in the Basque Country, residents are less likely to express their national identity as aligning mostly with their region.

Comparing survey data from the two regions also shows that respondents from the Basque Country are more likely than their Quebec counterparts to identify equally with their region and country. From 2018 to 2022, the proportion of Basque respondents who answered that they identify as equally Spanish and Basque was higher than the proportion of Quebec respondents who said that they consider themselves equally Québécois and Canadian. The highest proportion of respondents who identified equally with Quebec and Canada was 33% in 2018, but in 2019, 2020, and 2022, the percentages were 18%, 24%, and 19%, respectively. For the Basque Country, however, the proportion of respondents who identified as equally Spanish and Basque for the years between 2018 and 2022 was 34%, 33%, 32%, and 41%. The prevalence of dual national identities in the Basque Country relative to Quebec suggests a greater attachment to both country and region among Basque Country residents than in Quebec.

One of the most striking differences between survey data from Quebec and the Basque Country between 2018 and 2022 is the degree to which Quebec data on national identity appears



to vary more significantly by year than Basque data. For instance, the percentage of Quebec respondents who expressed their national identity as either exclusively or primarily Québécois decreased by 13% from 2019 to 2020, but then increased again by 11% from 2020 to 2022. Similarly, the proportion of respondents from Quebec who identified primarily or exclusively as Canadian increased by 6% from 2019 to 2020, but then decreased by 7% from 2020 to 2022.

<b>2018</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent Change from Previous Year</b>
Only Basque	20	N/A
More Basque than Spanish	21	N/A
Equally Basque and Spanish	34	N/A
More Spanish than Basque	6	N/A
Only Spanish	4	N/A
No Response	15	N/A
<b>2019</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent Change from Previous Year</b>
Only Basque	24	4
More Basque than Spanish	20	-1
Equally Basque and Spanish	33	-1
More Spanish than Basque	4	-2
Only Spanish	4	0
No Response	15	0
<b>2020</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent Change from Previous Year</b>
Only Basque	24	0
More Basque than Spanish	18	-2
Equally Basque and Spanish	32	-1

More Spanish than Basque	3	-1
Only Spanish	5	1
No Response	18	3
<b>2022</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent Change from Previous Year</b>
Only Basque	19	-5
More Basque than Spanish	26	8
Equally Basque and Spanish	41	9
More Spanish than Basque	3	0
Only Spanish	5	0
No Response	7	-11

Figure 1. Breakdown of survey data on national identity from the Basque Country, 2018-2022 (source: Sociómetros Vascos, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022)

For comparison, the proportion of respondents from the Basque Country who identified exclusively or primarily as Basque increased by 2% from 2019 to 2020, and then increased again by only 3% from 2020 to 2022. The proportion of respondents who identified exclusively or primarily as Spanish, meanwhile, remained constant at 8% between 2019 and 2020, although the percentage of residents who expressed their identity as exclusively Spanish increased by 1% and the proportion who identified as primarily Spanish decreased by 1%. This exact breakdown in national identity remained constant from 2020 to 2022 as well.

The variation found between resident expression of national identity in Basque Country and Quebec in this survey data analysis reveal an interesting relationship between identity and the scope of autonomy. Respondents from Quebec, where regional autonomy has a narrower scope, are more likely to identify themselves as exclusively or primarily Québécois than their Basque counterparts are to identify as exclusively or primarily Basque. Additionally, data on national identity from Quebec, where autonomy is more dynamic and informal, appears far more

variable than data from the Basque Country, which has a constitutionally and statutorily enshrined autonomy arrangement. The percent change from 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2022 for almost every category of national identity is higher for Quebec survey data than for Basque data.

<b>2018</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent Change from Previous Year</b>
Only Québécois	10	N/A
More Québécois than Canadian	29	N/A
Equally Québécois and Canadian	33	N/A
More Canadian than Québécois	9	N/A
Only Canadian	14	N/A
No Response	4	N/A
<b>2019</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent Change from Previous Year</b>
Only Québécois	18	8
More Québécois than Canadian	43	14
Equally Québécois and Canadian	18	-15
More Canadian than Québécois	14	9
Only Canadian	6	-8
No Response	1	-3
<b>2020</b>		
<b>Identity</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent Change from Previous Year</b>
Only Québécois	11	-7
More Québécois than Canadian	37	-6
Equally Québécois and Canadian	24	6
More Canadian than Québécois	14	0
Only Canadian	12	6
No Response	2	1

2022		
Identity	Percent	Percent Change from Previous Year
Only Québécois	19	8
More Québécois than Canadian	40	3
Equally Québécois and Canadian	19	-5
More Canadian than Québécois	12	-2
Only Canadian	7	-5
No Response	3	1

Figure 2. Breakdown of survey data on national identity from Quebec, 2018-2022 (source: Léger Marketing, 2018 and Environics Institute, 2019, 2020, 2022)

### Relationship Between Survey Data and Content Analysis

Fluctuations in yearly data from Quebec interestingly align with the dynamic nature of the province's autonomy, while the relative consistency of Basque data corresponds with the comparatively static nature of the Basque Country's regional autonomy. Additionally, the higher likelihood of Quebec respondents to identify with their province over their country closely parallels the more nationalistic political landscape and policy approach of the Quebec provincial government. In the Basque Country, meanwhile, where residents are more likely to identify as equally Basque and Spanish, legislation and political statements appear to place a greater emphasis on the multinational nature of the Spanish system of autonomy.

Between 2018 and 2022, the political environments of the Basque Country and Quebec differed considerably with regards to government attempts at expanding autonomy and enacting nationalist policies at the regional level. This is reflected in the differences between the legislation from Quebec and the Basque Country analyzed in this research. Bill 96 and Bill 21 were the subject of immense controversy both within Quebec and across Canada. The provisions of Bill 21 that prohibited public employees from wearing religious symbols and clothing, such as

veils, crucifixes, turbans, and face coverings, were condemned by Canadian civil rights groups like the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (Bird and Ross 2022). Many leaders within Quebec, meanwhile, such as the leader of the provincial Parti Québécois and the federal Bloc Québécois, supported the legislation (Riga 2019). In 2021, Bill 21 was challenged in court, where portions of the law were struck down by the lower Quebec Superior Court before the bill was upheld in its entirety by the Quebec Appeals Court in February 2024 (Stevenson 2024). Bill 96 was similarly controversial, with its adoption by the provincial parliament even sparking protest marches in the streets of Montreal (Austen 2022).

Both laws were hailed by the Coalition Avenir Québec and other nationalist parties in the provincial National Assembly, such as Québec solidaire and the Parti Québécois, as a brave defense of Quebec national identity and values, a sentiment echoed in the CAQ's 2022 election manifesto. To quote the CAQ's description of Bill 21 and Bill 96, the laws were adopted by "...nationalist government that stands up for [Quebec] identity and [Quebec] values" (Coalition Avenir Québec 2022, 4). From 2020 to 2022, which falls within the time between the passage of Bill 21 in June 2019 and the adoption of Bill 96 in May 2022, the percentage of Quebec residents who identified themselves as exclusively or primarily Québécois went from 48% in 2020 to 59% in 2022. However, from 2019 to 2020, this proportion dropped by 13%. Bills 21 and 96 represented fundamental shifts in the relationship between Canada and Quebec, with both laws invoking the notwithstanding clause of the Canadian Constitution that allows provinces to override Sections 2 and 7 through 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Serebrin 2024). Accordingly, this turn towards Québécois nationalism by the provincial government was first accompanied, as seen in Figure 2, by a sharp drop, then a significant increase, in the percentage of Quebec residents identifying as exclusively or primarily Québécois.

In the Basque Country, meanwhile, public discourse on issues of national identity and conflicts between the federal and regional government were relatively minimal over this same time period. In 2018, the separatist Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) formally disbanded after having previously disarmed in 2013, bringing a conclusive end to the militant group's decades-long low-level insurgency (Minder 2018). 2017 had also seen the autonomous government of Catalonia unilaterally declare independence following Madrid's refusal to hold a referendum on regional independence, resulting in the arrests and flight of key Catalan separatist leaders (Minder, Kingsley, and Schreuer 2018). This crisis, according to some observers, stoked public fears over the potentially destabilizing effects of a push for independence or greater autonomy in the Basque Country (Kingsley 2017). Additionally, the Normalization law and Law on Education did not generate political debate in the Basque Country on the scale of Bill 21 and Bill 96's controversy in Quebec. In 2020, regional legislative elections saw the EAJ-PNV under Iñigo Urkullu expand their seat count in the Basque Parliament and hand centrist nationalists yet another consecutive term (Parker 2020). Beyond these events, however, the political climate of the Basque Country remained largely stable relative to that of Quebec.

The Normalization of Use of Official Languages and the Law on Education utilize language that emphasizes their accordance with the Gernika Statute, and the importance of official Spanish-Basque bilingualism. This is despite the fact that both bills significantly expanded the role of the Basque language in public life, even to the extent that portions of the Normalization law were annulled by Spain's Constitutional Court in 2023 for violating the linguistic balance mandated by the Constitution (Vich 2023). Additionally, a plurality of Basque Country residents continued, between 2018 to 2022, to identify equally as Spanish and Basque. Furthermore, for each year analyzed in this research, the yearly percent change in category of

national identity was lower in the Basque Country than in Quebec. This suggests that patterns of national identity in Quebec are more dynamic, while the sense of national identity among residents of the Basque Country is more static.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

This research suggests that a broader scope of regional autonomy does not necessarily result in more nationalistic linguistic and social policies, or a higher percentage of residents identifying primarily with their region. These findings diverge from the view that policy decentralization leads to greater political radicalization and strengthens regionalist political parties. This research challenges the ideas of scholars including Brancati (2006) and Massetti and Schakel (2016), who have argued that regional decentralization indirectly increases support for regionalist political parties and encourages increased nationalism among regionalist parties.

This examination of territorial self-government in Quebec and the Basque Country addresses a gap in existing literature by comparatively analyzing variation of the scope of regional autonomy. Quebec, with its smaller scope of regional autonomy, has more nationalistic linguistic and social policies. Quebec legislation and the CAQ's electoral platform express greater opposition to the established provincial-federal relationship and espouse a more exclusive view of regional nationhood. Comparatively, Basque Country legislation and Iñigo Urkullu's campaign speech consistently discuss the established limits of territorial autonomy and a multinational regional identity in more favorable terms. Additionally, dual national identities appear to be more common among Basque Country residents than in Quebec, where a greater percentage of residents identify primarily with their region over their country. This suggests that perceptions of national identity in Quebec are more tied to a region-specific sense of nationhood

than in the Basque Country. Given Quebec's narrower regional autonomy, this suggests that a greater scope of territorial self-rule does not directly correspond with a higher rate of residents identifying with their region over their country.

However, given the factors that differentiate the histories and patterns of nationalism, regional autonomy, and national identity in the two regions, these conclusions are not entirely surprising. Literature on Basque nationalism largely hypothesizes that political violence among Basque secessionists, coupled with the Ibarretxe Plan's failure to secure greater Basque autonomy, led to a greater deference for the terms of the Gernika Statute among Basque nationalist leaders (Lecours 2021; Castells and Jauregui 1996; Davis 1997). Meanwhile, Quebec's inability to achieve independence from Canada and the rise of asymmetric federalism in the province promoted the emergence of a strain of Québécois nationalism that rejects both secession and coexistence with Canada (Lecours 2021, Changfoot and Cullen 2013).

This research argues that the element of territorial autonomy with the greatest impact on linguistic and social policies and patterns of national identity is the regional-federal relationship. The scope of regional self-government in Quebec and the Basque Country are differentiated by a number of factors, including the level of local control over fiscal policy and the jurisdiction of regional courts. However, one of the most striking distinctions between the systems of territorial autonomy in the two regions is the different ways in which regional governments interact with their respective central governments.

This research's findings suggest that well-defined autonomy arrangements yield a more cooperative relationship between territorial autonomies and the central government than unofficial devolutionary structures. Based on the results of this paper, explicitly defining the terms of the regional-federal intergovernmental relationship appears to promote stability and



reduce ideological radicalization in the political affairs and policymaking of autonomous regions. As the example of Quebec demonstrates, attempting to establish autonomy without the requisite institutional infrastructure, such as a formal self-rule agreement, can result in a disordered and disorganized regional-federal intergovernmental relationship.

In order for autonomy to promote stability in intergovernmental relationships and issues of identity, a shared understanding between regional and federal leadership on the terms and conditions of self-government is crucial. This paper suggests that clearly articulating the extent of a region's jurisdiction promotes collaboration and dialogue between regional and central government and potentially reduces the tendency of regionalist political parties to adopt more radical stances on questions of national identity and political status.

Autonomy is an inherently flexible and adaptable model of governance (Lluch 2012). This research demonstrates that autonomy must be tailored to regional contexts. The intended result of establishing regional self-government for a particular area, whether that be diffusing conflict, satiating separatist activity, or preempting political unrest, should guide the fundamental principles of an autonomy agreement. The model adopted in the Basque Country, which this research links with less divisive regional policy and greater resident identification with both region and country, is not certain to work in other conditions. This research finds that the historical development of nationalism and federalism in the Basque Country and Quebec significantly influence modern structures of autonomy in both regions. Regional-specific concerns should take precedence when building sustainable territorial autonomies.

In 1899, Canadian Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier somewhat controversially claimed that "Quebec has no opinions. Only sentiments" (Hutchinson 1964). While Laurier intended to dismiss the national consciousness emerging in his home province, the divergent experiences of

Quebec and the Basque Country suggest that policymakers should take the sentiments of restive regions seriously. Regional autonomy that ensures the structural integrity of states and incentivizes cooperation between national groups must be tailored to local contexts and flexible enough to accommodate the needs of regional populations. Failure to do so threatens to turn territorial autonomy into an instrument of great instability, deepening fractures within states, and sowing the seeds of further conflict.

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