



The Catalan 'Anomaly' and the Limits of the Comparative Theories of Secession

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Thursday, January 17, 2019
4:30 pm – 6:00 pm
Mackintosh-Corry Hall, Room D201



About the Speaker: Karlo Basta is an Associate Professor of Comparative Politics at Memorial University of Newfoundland. His work combines the study of comparative nationalism (with emphasis on multinational states), the symbolic dimension of formal institutions, and the politics of time and events. He has published in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism, Nations and Nationalism*, and other scholarly journals. Dr. Basta is currently completing a book manuscript titled *A Theory of the Multinational State: Decentralization, Symbolic Recognition, and Secessionist Crises* (under advance contract with McGill-Queen's University Press).

About the Lecture: Why does support for secession increase over time? Recent scholarship finds part of the answer to this question in the loss of pre-existing political autonomy. Yet, this apparently intuitive explanation runs aground – rather spectacularly – in the Spanish region of Catalonia. Here, support for independence rose when it was not supposed to have, and failed to increase when it was reasonable to expect it would. The presentation accounts for this apparent anomaly by challenging the key feature of existing studies – the assumption that loss of autonomy is an objective fact with ready-made meaning. Institutional change does matter in secessionist contests, not as a substantive 'causal variable', but as a discursive tool and a polysemic social fact. In the Catalan case, this feature of institutional change interacted with inter-party outbidding and civil society mobilization to produce for some of the counter-intuitive outcomes observed.