Small States & Territories, 9(2), 2026, 397-418

‘Autonomy plus’ meets ‘Sovereignty plus’: Small jurisdictions and a future of fractured sovereignty.

Godfrey Baldacchino
University of Malta
Malta
godfrey.baldacchino@um.edu.mt

Abstract: The world contains a large number of subnational jurisdictions (SNJs), including various small islands and archipelagos, with their citizens enjoying varying levels of autonomy, short of sovereignty. In their dealings with their patron state, these SNJs tend to progressively seek to extract even more powers of self-determination and self-rule; while the patron state often seeks contain these claims or nudge them forward, in ways that curtail and restrict that patron state’s clout and oversight over the subnational unit: we refer to this dynamic as ‘autonomy plus’. Meanwhile, states that enjoy full sovereignty may seek a level of protection and security – political, military or economic – afforded by a larger country, and one which they would not be able to assure for themselves alone: we refer to this trend as ‘sovereignty plus’. This paper argues that contemporary trends suggest a growing, politically stable, convergence of ‘autonomy plus’ territories and ‘sovereignty plus’ states along the ‘autonomy to sovereignty’ spectrum. Rather than independence and self-determination, in the context of a new international economic order, the governance model of the 21st century is likely to involve a fractured sovereignty that challenges, and transforms, but does not eliminate, core-periphery, colonial relations.

Keywords: asymmetry, autonomy plus, dependency, mainland-island relations, New Caledonia, policy competences, sovereignty plus, Srebrnik index, subnational island jurisdictions, suzerainty, Tuvalu

© 2026: Islands and Small States Institute, University of Malta, Malta.

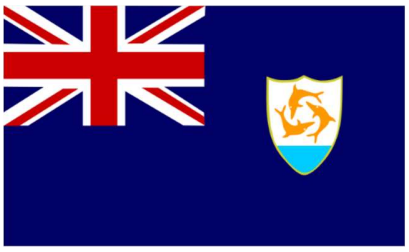
Introduction: Fractured sovereignty

In a November 2024 plebiscite, coinciding with the US Presidential election, a majority of voters in Puerto Rico again favoured statehood for their territory, with options for independence and free association also on the ballot (Pantojas García, 2026). In 2025 and again in January 2026, re-elected US President Donald Trump declared that the USA should ‘take over’ Greenland, triggering frantic diplomacy by Denmark, NATO and the European Union (Zellen, 2025). In July 2025, France announced a ‘historic’ agreement with New Caledonia whereby its South Pacific overseas territory, which had been rocked by social unrest in 2024 over controversial electoral reforms, will be declared a new state, yet remaining part of France (Al Jazeera, 2025). In December 2025, Representatives of Papua New Guinea and the island territory of Bougainville held more talks in Port Moresby over the future of the autonomous region's political status, after a 2019 independence referendum had garnered massive support (Ivarature, 2025).

These are a few, recent episodes that alert us to the fractured nature of sovereignty in the modern world: situations where, rather than a monolithic and centralised power structure, states have multiple, localized, and temporal cores of political power (Gazit, 2009). Many small, subnational - including 100+ island or archipelagic - jurisdictions exercise some form of political autonomy via provisions condoned by parent sovereign states. These include units that are officially known as: special administrative regions (Macau, Hong Kong), special self-governing province (Jeju), overseas territories (Bermuda, Falklands, Gibraltar, French Polynesia), associated states (Cook Islands, Niue), home rule arrangements (Faroes, Greenland), unincorporated territories (Puerto Rico, Guam), autonomies (Åland), units in federations (Hawaii, Prince Edward Island), and 'countries' within kingdoms (Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten). At least one 'wannabe sovereign' island province (Bougainville) is negotiating over its future.

Sovereignty is not absolute, but layered and contextual. The small size and political sensitivity of such and similar territories make them places where the paradigm of unitary sovereignty can be subtly adjusted without being formally overturned. The "politics of small things" (Goldfarb, 2006) is manifested through routine micro-politics: having their own flags (see Figure 1), coat-of-arms and national football teams, issuing their own postage stamps and automobile number plates (see Figure 2), apart from having their own local houses of assembly, wielding their own special passports, and enjoying their own internet top-level domain name (by way of example) grants these subnational units with a recognition that supports their identity affirmation and which may halt, but also fuel, further, incremental autonomy. Such powers can also generate internal asymmetries, prompting legitimate questions about why some jurisdictions receive greater recognition than others. For the sovereign state, 'condoning' autonomy, and then being party to its creep assumes the character of a graduated devolution which, however, typically stops short of full independence: hence the phrase 'autonomy plus'. Symbolic tools can accommodate local identities while preserving overall metropolitan control. Other powers granted to sub-state units are far from banal or symbolic, however. This core-periphery dynamic has been described as a "postcolonial sovereignty game" (Adler-Nissen & Gad, 2013; Baldacchino, 2012).

Figure 1: Flag of Anguilla, a British Overseas Territory in the Caribbean (population: around 17,000). The island is now cashing in on the lease of its internet domain name: .ai. Anguilla's House of Assembly has 11 elected representatives. It refused to join St Kitts-Nevis as a tri-island independent state in the late 1960s. (Image: from public domain)



<u>Figure 2</u>: Vehicle Number Plate from Åland, showing flag and coat-of-arts. (Nothing on the plate indicates that Åland – population: 28,000 – is an autonomy within the sovereign state of Finland.) Aland's Parliament has 30 elected representatives. (Image: from public domain).



There are thousands of sub-national jurisdictions (SNJs) in the world today, ranging from municipalities to provinces and autonomous regions. These include some 120 island units, or SNJs that are on islands (Baldacchino, 2010, pp. 203-214; Prinsen, 2020; Stuart, 2008). The bulk of these units consists of the constituent parts of federative (and typically large) states. *Federations* include Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Indonesia and Russia.

In *federacies,* however, the relationship with the central government is more nuanced. Asymmetry arrangements abound. Indeed, it is common to find countries that have *both* federative and federacy structures in place, fielding dependencies, asymmetries and autonomies under the mantle of the same central government (Watts, 2013). Thus, the United States has 50 states (which largely comprise a federative structure); but also 16 territories (of which five are inhabited) where the relationship with Washington DC is more fluid. Puerto Rico and Guam are two such US territories.

Canada has ten provinces as well as three territories and various First Nations communities whose policy influencing capacity cuts across all levels of government. Within this arrangement, there is "considerable scope for asymmetry", particularly in the operation of federal-provincial agreements, programmes and policies, and mainly driven by the historic obligation to nurture francophone Quebec as an integral part of a largely-anglophone Canada.

China has 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, four mega-city municipalities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing) and two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau), the latter two justifying a 'one country, two systems' approach (Leung, 2016). From Beijing's standpoint, Taiwan is a rogue province; it has also been offered the status of a special administrative region. Special economic zones (SEZs) have been set up in Shantou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai in Guangdong Province, and in Xiamen in Fujian Province; as well as the entire island province of Hainan (Zhang, Lou & Ning, 2021).

The world's six lingering European colonial and postcolonial powers – Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom – all have federacy arrangements. While trying to handle the latest round of US bluster, Denmark is gradually and consensually cooperating with both Greenland and Faroes in their respective transitions towards self-determination (Ackrén, 2006; Grydehøj, 2016). The Netherlands has addressed its Antillean territories by embracing three islands (Bonaire, Saba, St Eustatius) as special municipalities of the Netherlands; while the remaining two and a half islands (Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten) have a separate status as quasi-autonomous 'countries' (Wathey, 2015). France, a unitary state, has territories in every ocean of the planet (Connell & Aldrich, 2024). Some have been departments of France and effectively

decolonised and incorporated into the country since 1946; the latest, Mayotte, has been since 2011. Others are still considered overseas territories and Paris, jealous of its global reach, would be loath to allow any of them to secede. Nevertheless, the fractious outcome of three 'independence referenda' in New Caledonia has nudged Paris towards considerations of even more 'creative governance', conceding even more autonomy that had been thought imaginable (Abler, 2024; Chappell, 2013; Conklin et al., 2014) and possibly including a New Caledonian nationality, with its own passport (Baldacchino et al., 2027). France's closest SNIJ, Corsica, is moving toward a historic status of autonomy within the French Republic, with the French National Assembly having approved a key constitutional reform bill in June 2026 (RFI, 2026). Spain is the youngest democracy of this set – since 1975 – and this might explain its overall reticence towards allowing any degree of constitutional autonomy to its component parts. But its sub-units do not necessarily agree with this stance: the Basque country was the focus of anti-central state terrorism for many years; and Catalonia has taunted "pseudo-federal" Madrid with its own self-declared referendum on independence (Fuentes, 2016; Otero et al., 2025). Portugal's two archipelagos, the Azores and Madeira, are both autonomous regions (Bartmann, 1996; Rodrigues, 2023). Finally, the UK maintains 14 overseas territories (UKOTs) which are internally self-governing, and of which all but one are islands or on islands (Dodds, 2002; Winchester, 2009; Clegg, 2018). Some of the sub-state components of France, along with the Canaries (Spain) and Azores and Madeira (Portugal), are considered "outermost regions" of the European Union. Meanwhile, Greenland and Faroes (Denmark), as well as the UKOTs and other territories of France and the Netherlands, are *not* part of the EU but are considered "overseas countries and territories", with their own special relationship with the European Union (Adler-Nissen and Gad, 2013). Note also that practically *all* these territories except French Guiana, Gibraltar and the continental regions of Spain, plus the autonomous Spanish cities on North Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, are islands or archipelagos.

In a federacy, the political arrangement is such that a larger unit is linked to a smaller unit/s; and while the smaller unit may have only a minimal role, if at all, in the government of the larger one, the smaller unit can retain considerable autonomy over its own domestic affairs. It is on the nature of the policy fields that lie at the basis of this relationship that this paper will focus.

The (small) island effect

The disposition towards both federative and federacy arrangements is enhanced by the geographical delineation and remoteness that typically concerns islands. Distance from the metropole, the distinct geographically contoured space, and the sense of island identity that this combination of form and distance engenders, make islands premier candidates for jurisdictional design and a specific development trajectory and destiny (Baldacchino, 2020). This is partly the reason why there are 47 island and archipelagic states in the world – embracing almost a quarter of the world's total number of states – even though they only include just over 10% of the world's population. Hence, islands are disproportionately represented in the family of jurisdictions. In some cases, small island states are themselves federations (Veenendaal, 2015). Have so few ever been governed by so many? The most notable example is Palau, with 16 states and both a tribal chiefdom and elected legislature in each state, for 20,000 people (Veenendaal, 2016). The Federated States of Micronesia comes next: with a population of around 120,000, organised as four constituent states; and with no less than three of these – Yap, Chuuk and Pohnpei – having threatened secession at some point (Dziedzic, 2020). Meanwhile, the Comoros adopted the

federative route also to (seek to) quell secessionism within the four-member archipelago (Anckar, 2003); it still lost Mayotte to France.

When located at the edges of territorial realms, islands can also be platforms for the projection of central power and reach. Here, and unlike demands for self-determination, the thrust is reversed: designs for special arrangements for islands are likely to be pushed from the centre and may meet either resistance or encouragement from the island population itself. Consider the transformation of the 'Peace Island' of Jeju into an air and naval military base by South Korea (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2013; Yeo, 2013); and the continued militarisation of Okinawa, Japan (Davis, 2017).

Policy capacities: Dependencies, asymmetries, autonomies

Subnational units have been categorised in their relationship to central powers. Marks, Hooghe, Chapman, et al. (2014) propose a typology which captures 'subnational-central' power dynamics along a continuum of increasingly devolved powers, but coalescing around three 'stages': dependency, asymmetry and autonomy (See Table 1).

Table 1: Types of differentiation of sub-state units.

	How does the sub-state unit stand in relation to the central state?	How does the sub-state unit stand in relation to other regions in the same state?	What is the character of rule in the sub-state unit?	Examples
Dependency	Unilateral: sub-state unit receives central state direction	Excluded from any sub-state standard	Central rule	Isla de la Juventud (Cuba), Kish (Iran), Labuan (Malaysia), Anticosti (Quebec/ Canada)
Asymmetry	Multilateral: sub-state unit relates to central state as part of a standard tier.	Deviation from a standard: policy wide frame with differentiation of governance for sub-state units	Some self-rule and some shared rule	Catalonia (Spain), Flanders (Belgium) Puerto Rico (USA)
Autonomy	Bilateral: sub-state unit relates to central state directly	Anomaly without a standard: unrelated to a sub-state tier	More self-rule, less shared rule	Aceh (Indonesia), Greenland (Denmark), Jeju (Korea), Quebec and Nunavut (Canada), Scotland (UK).

Source: Adapted from Marks et al. (2014, p. 20).

A *dependency* describes a region that is fully incorporated and subject to direct 'top-down' rule from the centre. Here, local government is typically the conduit for the enactment of central (and not local, autonomous) decisions and the distribution of funding. The bilateral relationship is hierarchical, and minimally negotiable: Galápagos (Ecuador, since 2009), Gozo (Malta), Irian Jaya/ West Papua (Indonesia), Kish (Iran), Socotra (Yemen) and Puerto Rico (USA) – one of the world's most populous sub-national island jurisdictions – are examples.

An *asymmetry* conventionally describes a federal system in which one or more of the sub-state components exercises some additional powers, typically not shared by other constitutive units of the same state. Here, local government operates triadically, involving both bilateral (local-central) and multilateral (peer-to-peer) relations within the country. It flexes this additional clout often with the connivance of the central state which seeks to extract its own mileage and positional advantage from this exceptional status; and to the envy and chagrin of other state sub-units within the same state who lack such additional powers: these may resist the empowerment of one of their number or they may seek to imitate it. Catalonia (Spain) and Flanders (Belgium) are apt examples. The central state may fear competitive regional mobilisation for greater self-rule.

An *autonomy* describes a region that exercises significant self-rule, usually as a function of a minority nationalist identity and demands. It engages in almost exclusive bilateral relations with the central state, with no room for comparison with other sub-state units (if and where they exist). Here, the local government may experience a turbulent and bumpy relationship with the central state, now accommodating, now resisting, now taunting, scapegoating or blackmailing. Åland (Finland), Rodrigues (Mauritius), Aceh (Indonesia), Azores (Portugal), Faroes (Denmark), Gotland (Sweden), Hainan (China), Quebec and Nunavut (Canada) and Tobago (Trinidad and Tobago) each have particular relationships with the central state, producing unique, *sui generis*, idiosyncratic arrangements (Stepan 1999; Watts, 1998, 2015). Marks et al. (2014)'s *autonomy* captures the highest form of what is here dubbed as 'autonomy plus'.

A key policy challenge would be for dependencies in federations to 'graduate' and become asymmetries; for asymmetries to become autonomies; and for autonomies, to consider an expansion of their powers; and – rarely nowadays – outright independence. Bougainvilleans resolutely voted to become their own country in 2019 (Regan et al., 2022); but the details are still being worked out. In contrast, and if unhappy with the exceptionality of the sub-state player – its fiscal profligacy, corruption, sedition, scandal, threats to the rule of law, discrimination and physical violence are some of the triggers – the central government may seek to rein in the special powers and/or status of the sub-state unit, seeking opportunities to demote autonomies to asymmetries; and transforming asymmetries into dependencies. Examples of such retrenchment include: Hong Kong since Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law in 2020 (Lo, 2021); Norfolk Island since 2016 (Aroney, 2021; Nobbs, 2018; Phillips, 2016); Kurdistan (Salam, 2025) and the British Virgin Islands in 2022 (Georges, 2025). The impacted citizens would, in the meantime, be crying shame and accuse the parent state of brazen colonialism.

Evidence suggests that the central state's resistance to autonomy tends to be far less intense than resistance to asymmetry: in a review of the fate of 201 autonomous regions over a 60-year period (1950-2010), 46 regions have gained autonomous status; whereas just eight have lost it; of which three (Aceh, Northern Ireland, Washington DC) only temporarily; two became US states (Alaska, Hawaii); one become a sovereign state (Singapore) while the status of Kosovo as a sovereign state is contested. That leaves the province of Vojvodina, whose separatism is not endorsed by Serbia.

In contrast, only four regions gained asymmetric status in the same period; while 93 lost it, these being mainly within Russia: part of the move towards stronger central state control implemented by President Vladimir Putin (Hutcheson & McAllister, 2021). Thus, the evidence suggests that, once a subnational unit secures autonomy, it enters a stable, holding pattern, not easily dislodged or reversed. Indeed, in this "infinite pause" of decolonisation (Connell, 2003), a

subnational autonomy is a sustainable political unit. Jersey and Guernsey are probably the oldest exponents of this, with 800+ years of autonomy.

As evidence of the stability of autonomy, recent history offers various examples of other 'independence hopefuls' who chose not to follow that route. In 1985, Aruba reneged and stuck to a *status aparte*: a 'country' within the Kingdom of the Netherlands; The Hague accepted this; so much so that Curaçao and Sint Maarten have settled in the same category since 2010. The Northern Mariana Islands actively sought and approved a covenant in 1975 to become a commonwealth in political union with the US, officially becoming a US territory in 1986. Bermuda, the wealthiest, most populous and most developed of the UK's Overseas Territories, rejected independence via referendum in 1995: on a voter turnout of 59%, 74% voted against (Clegg, 2025).

A sovereignty index

Meanwhile, the policy fields over which subnational units may wish to exercise full control, or wrest such control from the central government, are various. Canadian political scientist Henry Srebrnik (2007) compiled what he calls a 'sovereignty index', so far unpublished, that breaks down these capacities into specific policy fields, organised as constitutionally entrenched, legislative and executive powers (see Table 2). The reference to 'control' in the table is, of course, subject to further examination and its operation on the ground may change from one jurisdiction to another.

Table 2: The Srebrnik Sovereignty Index.

- degree of constitutionally-entrenched jurisdictional autonomy
- legislative powers
- judicial powers and control over legal system (civil and/or criminal)
- separate electoral system and political parties
- degree of influence and representation in central institutions of decision-making units and bodies of governance in larger entities (such as a federation)
- executive powers
control over symbols of national identity and shared history
control over customs, duties, taxation and other banking services and fiscal resources
control over the currency
control over international trade
control of the environment (landscaping, recycling, waste handling, energy and decarbonisation)
control over the proceeds of natural resources (including offshore resources)
control over citizenship, immigration and rights of residency
control over land ownership and use
control over aviation, marine services, communications, postal services and transportation
control over defence, foreign affairs and security
control over international relations (including paradiplomacy and international representation)
control over culture and language
control over education and institutions of higher learning

Source: Adapted from Srebrnik (2007, personal communication).

The ascendency of 'sovereignty plus'

Meanwhile, there are rumblings on the sovereignty front. There, the inspiration is brutally pragmatic. As Corbett (2023, p. 3) rightly points out, "self-determination is perceived as a hollow achievement unless it is accompanied by economic development": I would amend and expand this last phrase to "economic, military and environmental security". Especially with the smallest of states, and in spite of their sovereignty, all talk of 'development' suggests an elusive evolving process that is hard to operationalise (Baldacchino, 1993). Moreover, a dearth of economic opportunities, the consequences of sea level rise and the risk of military adventurism has highlighted the vitality of sound security arrangements, whether economic or political, by all states, but by the smallest states most of all. Consider these examples:

> One of the earliest examples is Anguilla. This island was meant to graduate to independence as part of the tri-island state of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. But Anguilla rebelled against this arrangement in 1967. It was a *de facto* state until 1969, until it was eventually reabsorbed as a UKOT in 1980.
>
> The three Pacific 'Compact' states – Palau, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia – all members of the UN, have planted themselves firmly as "hybrid jurisdictions": sovereign yet under the security and economic umbrella of the USA (Pöllath, 2018).
>
> The Cook Islands and Niue – self-governing states in 'free association' with New Zealand, since 1965 and 1974 respectively – bear a status that strikes very close to full sovereignty, but 'trades' aspects of it in exchange for desirable 'goods': in their case, a New Zealand citizenship and passport. In a recent spat, New Zealand has refused to consider a Cook Islands passport that did not come with its own, Cook Islands citizenship. The loss of New Zealand citizenship is probably the main reason both these small Pacific jurisdictions have not sought to join the United Nations.
>
> Naoero (formerly Nauru), for a while boasting the world's highest per capita GDP, now depends precariously on bilateral aid from Australia and the 'on / off' running of an offshore detention processing facility for the same country. A 2024 Nauru-Australia Treaty assures aid; while Australia maintains economic and political oversight of Nauru's security-related decision-making (Atkins, 2026).
>
> East Timor secured independence in 2002 at the same time that a revenue-sharing agreement with Australia over oil and gas exploration from the Timor Sea took effect (Strating, 2017).
>
> Tuvalu is the most recent example of a sovereign state to have secure a lifeline, also with Australia, formalised via the 2023 Falepili Union. The country has become a posterchild for island communities embattled by the consequences of climate change and sea level rise. Coincidentally, Corbett (2021, p. 1) uses the example of the independence of Tuvalu in 1978 to raise concerns about the alleged ridiculousness of such tiny sovereign units. Tuvalu's pact with Australia – which includes a guaranteed annual number of 280 Tuvaluan refugees – is a response to a dire political, economic and environmental predicament and may presage similar arrangements by other Small Island Developing States, especially in the Pacific.

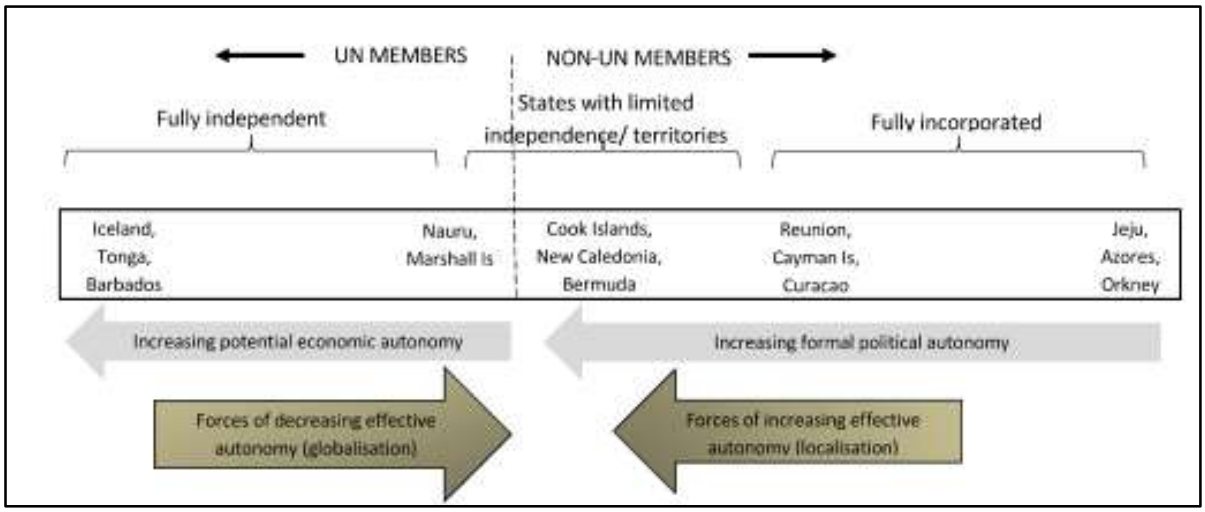
> Tuvalu's agency is also manifest in creating its Digital copy, embedding its perpetuity as a state in its constitution, and establishing permanent baselines under UNCLOS that do not change with retreating coastlines (Grima, 2023; Vaha, 2026).
>
> A putative independent Bougainville is also likely to maintain a special relationship with Papua New Guinea. Bougainville has substantial mineral resources that have so far bankrolled PNG's economy; but the island lacks the administrative machinery of government. Reforms at the political, institutional, and technical levels are deemed urgent (Nobetau, 2025).
>
> Enhanced autonomy arrangements for an eventual 'State of New Caledonia', and perhaps eventually for other French overseas territories, are likely to recognize some affiliation to the French state. The measure, proposed in July 2025 in Paris, involves a *sui generis* status, legally hybrid, situated somewhere between federalism and free association" (Milhiet & Pantz, 2025).

Thus, a more uncertain international relations landscape, precarious public revenue streams, plus the threats of global warming and sea level rise, exposes the multiple vulnerabilities of many states – small island states most of all – and thus prioritises their desire for 'shelter' (Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2018). The 1983 US invasion of Grenada; and Russia's incursions in Ukraine since 2014 may have also subsequently dampened the appetite for any subnational jurisdictions for independence (Charles, 1987). The contemporary threats by Washington DC to 'take over' Greenland has unsettled many small jurisdictions and further pushed back the attractions of full sovereignty, including for Greenland itself (Lykkeberg, 2026). No wonder that the march towards independence, with the most populous candidates going first, did not extend to the smallest candidates (Baldacchino, 2004). The post-war momentum towards independence ground to a crawl after 1984; and has halted since 2011.

How 'autonomy plus' meets 'sovereignty plus'

How can one approach the Srebrnik listing with a more analytic and critical bent? One way is to categorize or group these policies, as attempted by Baldacchino (2006a; 2010, pp. 76-83). Kerr (2005, p. 504) suggests that it is "useful to consider a continuum": in his case, the continuum dealt with actual island units, from Lindisfarne (no autonomy) to New Zealand (maximum autonomy / sovereignty), rather than the actual policy capabilities wielded by those jurisdictions. Bertram and Poirine (2018, reproduced as Figure 3) resort to Kerr's figure and stick to jurisdictional examples along its spectrum, in their case highlighting that, towards the centre of the diagram, there is a group of "states with limited independence" as well as non-sovereign "territories with state-like autonomy" which share many characteristics that span what is, policy-wise, not such a sharp dividing line (as argued above). Thus, one could add, the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Naoero/Nauru, Palau and – with its 2023 Falepili Union with Australia – Tuvalu (Barnett, et al., 2025) constitute examples of 'sovereignty plus'. Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Nauru have secured agreements with Australia in recent months. They approach the capacities of jurisdictions that are 'autonomy plus' (Bermuda, Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Niue).

Figure 3: Continuum from dependency to sovereignty.



Source: Bertram and Poirine (2018, Figure 1), based on Kerr (2005, p. 504, Figure 1).

One can and should go further than this. Sticking to the idea of a continuum, the suite of policy options can also be grouped in some kind of hierarchy, scale or gradation, suggesting that some are easier, or more likely, to devolve from central government; while others, much less so. Here, I follow Watts (2015) who, however, focuses on the constitutional and legal clout and powers of states and territories, rather than on what those powers are used *for*. One can, therefore, expand and deepen Srebrnik's 2007 listing with a suggested *gradation* of these executive powers.

Soft powers

A number of these competences are relatively 'soft', more easily conceded by central governments; and more easily, safely and effectively administered by local autonomous units. They hardly threaten the authority of the central state; and they offer a workable accommodation that (largely) avoids secessionism and separatism. Soft policies would include:

control over land ownership and use
control over culture and language
control over education and institutions of higher learning
control of the environment (landscaping, upkeep, waste handling, energy)
separate electoral system and political parties

In small jurisdictions, identifiable minority groups can be easily overwhelmed demographically via immigration. Hence, title to land would be important in order to maintain control over the dynamics of population growth and cultural pluralism. Central governments would tolerate the implementation of stringent criteria governing who can become a resident of a subnational unit. Such criteria are typically asymmetrical: they would not apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the rights of citizens in the home country. Thus, the citizens of the UK overseas territories can

all apply for residency in the UK; but for a UK resident to secure residency in an overseas territory like Bermuda, let alone purchase property, strict conditions apply. Guernsey and Jersey operate distinct property markets for expatriate residents. A more nuanced version of this 'soft policy' is the property price tag and property tax differential charged between residents and non-residents, or even the limits in the amount of land that could be owned by non-residents. Prince Edward Island, Canada, charges non-residents double the property tax it charges residents; while in Guernsey, Jersey and Bermuda, there is a specific housing market for non-residents.

Language is another important marker of identity and the communities of subnational units will be keen to preserve this marker, especially when faced by the threat of many co-nationals who speak a different language. Schools and educational institutions are carriers of culture and language policy: many sub-state units will have provisions for teaching their children in the local (but also the metropolitan) language. Thus, residents of Åland must, by law, be Swedish speakers; 'the island' of Quebec in Canada upholds French as the official language in the province and operates its own immigration policy such that Francophones are favourably discriminated; For 30 years, public schools in Spain's Catalonia region have taught most subjects in Catalan, not the national Castilian/Spanish language (Ortiz, 2014).

Environmental management is a policy capacity that is often devolved, granted even to municipal government. Sub-state governments may be tasked to protect and enhance particular ecosystems and ensure a harmonious co-existence between people and their biota. 97% of the land area of the Galápagos islands are a national park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Socotra is a special conservation area of Yemen, with its own governorate since 2013; while the municipality of the Lofoten islands has been declared a petroleum exploration free zone of Norway (though this status is under threat) (Dutton, 2016; Kristoffersen et al., 2021).

The existence of a separate electoral system may be necessary to elect the members of the local house of assembly or local government. In various cases, the parties involved in contesting for such seats bear no resemblance to those involved in national elections, affirming the disposition towards a minority national identity (Hepburn and Baldacchino, 2013).

Other powers help to establish control over policy fields that are often also entrusted to local and municipal level government.

Hard powers

Other policy competences should be considered 'hard' competences, because they are more likely to irk central governments, may have serious implications on fiscal transfers to the central state, or invite resistance or hostility if contemplated or initiated from the sub-state unit and contrary to the grand plans of the centre. On the other hand, should other sub-state members of the state already enjoy such privileges (and responsibilities), then the other sub-state units desirous of a 'status upgrade' may lobby effectively to get the state to at least consider extending these (already existing and presumably well-working) policy capacities to additional and deserving subnational units. Hard policy competences would include:

control over citizenship, immigration and rights of residency
control over customs, duties, taxation and other banking services and fiscal resources
control over the proceeds from natural resources (including offshore resources)
control over the currency
control of international trade
control over aviation, communications, postal services and transportation
control over defence, foreign affairs and security
relations with other jurisdictions (including paradiplomacy / international representation)

Recent decades have seen the advancement of sub-state units as offshore finance centres (with mixed results) as an expression of this 'win win' condition. All the more so when the sub-state unit is an *island*, where the geographical boundedness and isolation help to ringfence and corral any initiative involving the offer of banking services. This ensures the lack of spill over, while still maintaining purview and oversight (Bertram & Poirine, 2018). In fact, in a listing of offshore financial centres, 28 out of 43 identified locales are on islands (Roberts, 1994, p. 93; also Shaxson, 2025)

While fiscal policy can be a 'shared' competence, monetary policy is usually not. Subnational units do not have the equivalence of central banks and rarely have any influence on currency controls. (And yet, note the Central Banks of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten; these islands also have their own currencies; and their banks are responsible for monetary policy.)

Nor do sub-national units usually have powers over the terms of international trade. Nevertheless, the notion of a free port and export processing zone (EPZ) has been practised in various island units of larger states. The first such zone came into being in 1937 at Stapleton, Staten Island, New York, USA (Palan, 2003, p. 119). The model was then perfected with respect to another, larger island, Puerto Rico, and from there on to the setting up of Taiwan's first EPZ (suggestively, on an artificial island in Kaohsiung harbour) and then in Indonesia (on Batam Island, just off Singapore) (Palan, 2003, p. 122). Hong Kong and Macau are two such 'free ports': they pursue a free trade policy and maintain no barriers on trade, with no tariff charged on the import or export of goods.

No effective trade or tourism policy can be brought to fruition without a sound transportation policy. Åland is jealous of its ownership of two of the large passenger ferry companies that ply the busy Stockholm-Mariehamn-Turku route in the Baltic, so popular with shoppers because it operates a duty-free service (Baum, 1996; Esko, 2025). Strong lobbying was successful in improving the terms with which travellers could travel between Mauritius and its sub-national island jurisdiction of Rodrigues (Wergin, 2012). The sub-state unit canvasses aggressively for the financing by the central state of the infrastructure required for a suitable airport, sea port, cruise ship terminal or a fixed link such a causeway or bridge (as well as, preferably, of their maintenance). It will also seek to improve the terms at which this critical communication life-line to the mainland is operated, particularly the cost, frequency and choice over means of travel. Sub-state residents may benefit from 'public service obligations' that protect such services from the vagaries of market forces; they may also benefit from specific subsidies.

Hand in hand with international trade goes international representation. After all, much of the purpose of ongoing (peacetime) diplomacy is the facilitation and encouragement of bilateral trade flows. And, while the ability to entertain relations with other states is often assumed to be a core function of sovereignty, exceptions abound. Where non-independent actors are involved, this behaviour is usually referred to as para-diplomacy (Aldecoa and Keating, 1999; Kuznetsov, 2014). Montserrat is a full member of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (and with the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla and Martinique as associate members); since 2006, Quebec has its own representation to UNESCO and La Francophonie; since 2005, the Faroe Islands have official representation in Danish embassies in London, Reykjavik and Copenhagen; while nine European countries maintain consulates in Torshavn, the Faroese capital. Greenland / Kalaallit Nunaat maintains representative offices in Brussels and Copenhagen; and there are nine consulates in Nuuk, its capital. While explicitly excluded from international representation by virtue of the 1920 Autonomy Act, the Åland Islands maintain representation in Stockholm and Helsinki, and there is an Åland representative presence in the Finnish delegation in Brussels. Given its status, Taiwan engages "… in both official and internationally recognized channels of diplomacy in some cases and in cloaked para-diplomatic exchanges in others" (Bartmann, 2008, p. 65; also Newland, 2023).

With the coming into force of the United Nations 'Law of the Sea' in 1994, countries have been able to stake claims to considerable swathes of ocean, swelling their 'exclusive economic zone' in which mining and fishing are legitimate rights. The control over such vast oceanic spaces and their offshore resources – oil, gas, other minerals, fish – can be the focus of aggressive bilateral domestic negotiation. For example, Newfoundland & Labrador had a tense confrontation with the central Canadian government in 2004 over how to distribute profits from oil and gas deposits located in provincial waters (Baldacchino, 2009).

Finally, powers over defence and security are typically managed by the central state; unless, as in the cases of Åland and Svalbard, the territories are demilitarised by virtue of international treaties. These can be very expensive expressions of sovereignty, so the sub-state unit is usually keen to allow its central state to pick up this task, and cost. No confrontation is likely here. Indeed, in moments of natural calamity and civil unrest, it could be the sub-state unit itself which asks for the intervention of the central state to support recovery efforts with emergency funds, supplies and personnel. This unfolded in summer 2017 with the disasters left in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Caribbean: British Virgin Islands, US Virgin Islands, Sint Maarten/ St Martin and St Barthélemy all received quick pledges of material, human and financial aid from the respective metropolitan powers: France, Netherlands, UK and US obliged (Davidson, 2017).

Discussion

The movement from dependency to asymmetry to autonomy can be interpreted as a shift towards greater self-rule (though never absolute in a globalised and interconnected world) versus shared rule (or no rule at all). The policy fields over which such expressions of 'autonomy plus' are requested and claimed by the sub-state unit tend to deal with the 'hard' components of the list. The success or otherwise in securing such claims will depend on a complex array of vectors; but these will include the political leverage that the sub-state unit commands in the corridors of the central power; the support it enjoys among both the general and local population; the willingness by the central state to risk a showdown (that may compromise public safety and lead to civil disobedience

and strife); as well as the strategic opportunities that the central state sees in condoning the sub-state upgrade. It is the last of these options, and the opportunities it opens up for 'win win' solutions, that is the most likely to fuel a deepening of autonomy arrangements.

'Autonomy plus' becomes more strategically feasible when the desirous outcome is already available for all to see, in the guide of a fellow sub-state unit within the same polity. In such situations, all players can better determine the chances of success of the exercise and determine the risks involved in extending the experiment in jurisdictional autonomy.

Should that be the case, the march forward is best undertaken along not one, but various, policy fronts. For example, Åland maintains exclusive powers over the fields of education, health, culture, industry and policing and elects a single representative to the Finnish Parliament; in spite of dealing with Finland, which is a relatively young, strongly centralised, and increasingly nationalist state. Åland has also, over time, carved out some additional policy competences which might appear "banal" (Billig, 2017); but are powerfully suggestive of its autonomy from Finland: its own postal and philatelic service, its own motor vehicle number plates, and its own top-level internet domain name (.ax) (Hepburn, 2014).

Conclusion: Better to serve in heaven than reign in hell

More jurisdictions can be expected to bunch up and crowd along the dotted vertical line at the centre of Figure 3. The policy capacity gap between (small) subnational jurisdictions and (small) sovereign states thus appears to be closing. Autonomy arrangements have created a class of 'autonomy plus' jurisdictions, already responsible for most of the soft powers on the Srebrnik index; at the same time that the reality of the contemporary global (dis)order has exposed the fragility of the presumed absolutist power of sovereign states, rendering them more disposed towards opting for 'sovereignty plus', even if this means relinquishing some of the 'hard powers' on the Srebrnik index, most notably citizenship. The space for such gamesmanship and experimentation has grown. Small island units stand amongst the best candidates for grasping the opportunities thus presented: their size renders the costs of any 'shelter' more manageable and acceptable to the host country.

And so, the argument posed by Rezvani (2014) has become even more forceful. What he labels "partially independent territories" – that is, subnational jurisdictions – have "surpassed" the sovereign state: they consistently come across as more secure and relatively wealthier than their sovereign counterparts (also McElroy & Pearce, 2006). Admittedly: central powers have at times resisted this 'sovereignty creep'; but these episodes are the exceptions that justify the rule. Since Rezvani's book was published, an even more complex, flexible and fragmented sense and practice of sovereignty is in the air: hence Corbett's (2023) elegant *à la carte* designation. Small states and territories, often islands or archipelagos, lead by example: Tuvalu and Nauru/ Naoero's agreements with Australia, plus potential 'scenarios' for Bougainville and New Caledonia, suggest that more, creative governance practices are likely to emerge.

Meanwhile, even sovereign states have sought to "surpass" the limit of their sovereignty; and the smallest states most of all. Many are shopping for neighbouring or regional powers willing and able to take on the mantle of patrons, of guarantors of economic stability, of safe havens in

case of environmental disaster. Their economies already depend on transfers and rents from abroad given their small absolute size and the limits it imposes on their economic potential: remittances, aid, finance and tourism are the mainstays, as exemplified in the three 'ideal type' descriptions of such small economies found in the literature: MIRAB, SITE and PROFIT (Baldacchino, 2006b). Hence the smart resort to 'sovereignty plus'.

Alberti & Goujon (2020, p. 16) also argue against a naïve, binary notion of sovereignty. Using a set of indexes that approximate the Srebrnik classification, they posit that some 'autonomy plus', mainly island candidates – Anguilla, Bermuda, Gibraltar, Montserrat and Taiwan —have a higher level of sovereignty than some UN (sovereignty plus) members: specifically, the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Monaco, and Tuvalu.

Of course, the 'sovereignty plus' route is mired in controversy. Is it the 'win-win solution' that is suggested here, or a 'sovereignty minus' event, and even a return to colonialism? Atkins (2026) argues that the Falepili Union reflects Australia's priorities more than Tuvalu's; and that the Pacific has become a chessboard for global competition, with small states like Nauru becoming "little more than pawns, or client states" (Atkins, 2026, p. 11). Former Tuvalu prime minister Enele Sopoaga labelled the agreement an admission of self-defeat to climate change and called for a referendum as part of the ratification process. And yet, with all its flaws, Tuvalu has flexed its agency, leveraging its international status and advancing its interests through the Falepili Union.

Interestingly, a condition shared by both 'autonomy plus' and sovereignty plus' jurisdictions is that they allow the conduct of their international relations, their defence and security policy, to a 'guardian / parent' state. Indeed, there seems to be very little substantive difference in the policy capacity of these two classes of jurisdictions. The three key, related variances between them may boil down to: (1) the manner in which the decision to enter into a voluntary association with another state is taken; (2) the permanence or otherwise of that decision; (3) whether that decision is taken consensually by two sovereign players or unequally (Melin-Soucramenien Commission, 2022); and (4) *which* state to seek as patron: a question that becomes relevant if China is a potential candidate.

The stage is set for more sub-state jurisdictions to claw away more autonomy to enhance their self-determination; yet, steer clear from outright independence which would remove their current security umbrella, broadly defined. The range of policies that central states are likely to decentralise has been proposed. But the more elusive 'hard powers' can be transacted, mainly as expressions of 'sovereignty plus' jurisdictions.

The world has come a long way from the post-1945 heyday of nationalism, and the enthusiasm, often abetted by violence, to shed the colonial yoke and achieve freedom. The passion and zeal of the pursuit for independence has definitely subsided, instead giving way to sober pragmatism. The partisan narrative of nationalist self-determination may have encouraged a belief that independence is the panacea to development challenges. But: *pace* John Milton's Satan in the epic poem *Paradise Lost*, it may be better to serve in heaven than reign in hell. "Autonomy is more viable than independence" (Wathey, 2015). A string of failed 'independence referenda' confirms this hesitation to 'go it alone' (Baldacchino, 2004). The events that have unfolded in South Sudan, the world's most recently independent country since 2011, are cause for serious concern and

disillusionment (Pinaud, 2022). The long hiatus, already over 15 years, since any other state secured independence, is unprecedented in modern history. We should not be surprised.

The world has also changed since the 1920 ruling by the League of Nations that declared that Liechtenstein could not join as a member since it delegated some powers associated with sovereign statehood – its diplomatic representation – to Switzerland (Gunter, 1974); effectively "yielding important parts of its sovereignty to another state" (Beattie, 2004, pp. 137-8). Indeed, Liechtenstein was unproblematically admitted to the United Nations in 1990. The other European microstates – Andorra, San Marino and Monaco – have also secured UN membership, while maintaining special relationships with Spain and France, Italy and France respectively (Bartmann, 2012). (The last remaining microstate, Vatican City, has obtained UN observer status.)

We seem to be heading into an era of modern suzerainty, whereby a dominant power offers security and other guarantees to technically self-ruling yet 'vassal' jurisdictions, enjoying generous autonomy (but only limited independence). Although possibly tinged historically with notions of malevolence and domination, suzerainty endures as a powerful and useful idea, partly because "it has the potential to encapsulate and describe the changing and contemporary nature of national sovereignty among the nation states of the world" (Albahary, 2009, p. 512; *also* Cohan, 2006).

For much of the latter half of the 20th century, colonies aspired to independence and self-determination, also to rid themselves of an extractivist and exploitative politico-economic system and establish instead a new, post-capitalist, 'international economic order' (e.g. Getachew, 2019). Except perhaps in the case of Cuba, this aspiration has not been fulfilled. Instead, the governance model of the 21st century is less radical and idealist, and more pragmatic. It is also likely to involve a fractured sovereignty that challenges, and transforms, but does not eliminate, core-periphery, colonial relations (Corbett, 2023, p. 5).

Disclaimer

The author declares that this paper has not benefited from research funding.
The author declares no conflict of interest in writing this paper.
The author declares that Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) was not used in any way and at any stage in the crafting of this paper.

References

Al Jazeera (2025, July 12). New Caledonia declared a 'state' in autonomy deal, but will stay French. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/12/new-caledonia-declared-a-state-in-autonomy-deal-but-will-stay-french

Albahary, D. (2009) International Human Rights and global governance: The end of national sovereignty and the emergence of a suzerain world polity? *Michigan State University Journal of International Law*, *18*, 511-557.

Alber, E. (2024). New Caledonia: a promising attempt to constitutionalize a sovereignty conflict going wrong. *Perspectives on Federalism*, *16*(1), 12. https://www.on-federalism.eu/images/2024/Vol16_issue1/PoF_2024_Vol16-1_12_Alber.pdf

Alberti, F., & Goujon, M. (2020). A composite index of formal sovereignty for small islands and coastal territories. *Island Studies Journal*, *15*(1), 3-24. https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.96

Ackrén, M. (2006). The Faroe Islands: options for independence. *Island Studies Journal*, *1*(2), 223-238. https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.195

Adler-Nissen, R., and Gad, U. P. (Eds.) (2013). *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games: The EU overseas countries and territories*. Routledge.

Aldecoa, F., and Keating, M. (Eds.) (1999). *Paradiplomacy in action: The foreign relations of subnational governments*. Taylor & Francis.

Anckar, D. (2003). Lilliput federalism: profiles and varieties. *Regional & Federal Studies*, *13*(3), 107-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13597560308559437

Aroney, N. (2021). Subnational constitutionalism in Australia: State autonomy in a uninational federation. In *Routledge handbook of subnational constitutions and constitutionalism* (pp. 36-50). Routledge.

Atkins, K. (2026). The Nauru-Australia Treaty and Australia's unequal relationship with Nauru. *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *115*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2025.2588575

Badawi, H. (2026). The illegal fragmentation of Somalia: Israeli recognition of Somaliland and the violation of international law. *Horn of Africa Journal of Social Science*, *4* (Special Issue), 1-13.

Bahcheli, T., Bartmann, B., and Srebrnik, H. F. (Eds.). (2004). *De facto states: The quest for sovereignty*. Routledge.

Baldacchino, G. (2020). How far can one go? How distance matters in island development. *Island Studies Journal*, *15*(1), 25-42. https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.70

Baldacchino, G. (2018). Autonomy plus: the policy challenges faced by small, subnational (mainly island) jurisdictions. In J. A. Randall (Ed.) *The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Islands Economic Cooperation Forum: 2017 Annual report on global islands* (pp. 100-118). Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island. https://projects.upei.ca/unescochair/files/2021/04/Annual-Report-on-Global-Islands-2017-Chapter-4-Autonomy-plus-Godfrey-Baldacchino.pdf

Baldacchino, G. (2012). Governmentality is all the rage: the strategy games of small jurisdictions. *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *101*(3), 235-251. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2012.690964

Baldacchino, G. (2010). *Island enclaves: Offshoring strategies, creative governance and subnational island jurisdictions*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Baldacchino, G. (2009). Governance in small places: the unleashing of asymmetric federalism. In G. Baldacchino, L. Felt & R. Greenwood (Eds.), *Remote control: Governance lessons for and from small, insular and remote regions* (pp. 114-134). ISER Press.

Baldacchino, G. (2006a). Innovative development strategies from non-sovereign island jurisdictions? A global review of economic policy and governance practices. *World Development*, *34*(5), 852-867. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.10.004

Baldacchino, G. (2006b). Managing the hinterland beyond: Two ideal-type strategies of economic development for small island territories. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, *47*(1), 45-60.

Baldacchino, G. (2004). Autonomous but not sovereign? A review of island sub-nationalism. *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism, 31*(1-2), 77-89. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar//handle/123456789/13621

Baldacchino, G. (1993). Bursting the bubble: the pseudo-development strategies of microstates. *Development and Change*, *24*(1), 29-52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1993.tb00476.x

Baldacchino, G., & Milne, D. (2006). Exploring sub-national island jurisdictions: an editorial introduction. *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *95*(386), 487-502. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358530600929735

Baldacchino, G., Clegg, P., David, C. & Gad, U. P. (2027). Sub-national identity on state passports: challenging the unitary model of sovereignty. In J, Redmond, M. Geary, B. Scutearu, A. Shalvey & G. Baldacchino (Eds.), *The Palgrave Macmillan handbook of identity documentation,* forthcoming.

Barnett, J., Farbotko, C., Kitara, T., & Aselu, B. (2025). Migration as adaptation? The Falepili Union between Australia and Tuvalu. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, *16*(1), e924. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.924

Bartmann, B. (2012). From the wings to the footlights: the international relations of Europe's smallest states. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, *50*(4), 535-554.

Bartmann, B. (2008). In or out: sub-national island jurisdictions and the antechamber of para-diplomacy. In G. Baldacchino and D. Milne (Eds.), *The case for non-sovereignty: Lessons from sub-national island jurisdictions* (pp. 57-75). Routledge.

Bartmann, B. (1996). *Saltwater frontiers: Jurisdiction as a resource for small islands.* Keynote address. Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada. http://projects.upei.ca/iis/files/2014/05/SALTWATER-FRONTIERS.pdf

Beattie, D. (2004). *Liechtenstein: A modern history*. I. B. Tauris.

Bertram, G. and Poirine, B. (2018). Island political economy. In G. Baldacchino (Ed.), *The Routledge international handbook of island studies* (pp. 202-246). Routledge.

Baum, T. (1996). Tourism and the Åland islands. *Progress in Tourism and Hospitality Research*, *2*(2), 111-118.

Billig, M. (2017). Banal nationalism and the imagining of politics. In *Everyday nationhood: Theorising culture, identity and belonging after banal nationalism* (pp. 307-321). Palgrave Macmillan.

Born, G. B. (2015). *International arbitration: Cases and materials*. Wolters Kluwer Law & Business.

Calvert, P. (2016). *The Falklands crisis: The rights and the wrongs*. Bloomsbury.

Chappell, D. A. (2013). *The Kanak awakening: The rise of nationalism in New Caledonia.* University of Hawai'i Press.

Charles, M. E. (1997). *A future for small states: Overcoming vulnerability*. Commonwealth Secretariat.

Clegg, P. (2025). Bermuda's independence referendum: 30 years on. *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *114*(5), 712-715. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2025.2547251

Clegg, P. (2018). The United Kingdom and its overseas territories: no longer a 'benevolent patron'? *Small States & Territories, 1*(2), 149-168**.** https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/44833

Cohan, J. A. (2006). Sovereignty in a post-sovereign world. *Florida Journal of International Law*, *18*(3), Article 5. https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/fjil/vol18/iss3/5

Conklin, A. L., Fishman, S., & Zaretsky, R. (2014). *France and its Empire since 1870*. Oxford University Press.

Connell, J. (2003). New Caledonia: An infinite pause in decolonization?. *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *92*(368), 125-143. https://doi.org/10.1080/750456742

Connell, J., & Aldrich, R. (2024). Remnants of empire: France's overseas departments and territories. In *France in world politics* (pp. 148-169). Routledge.

Corbett, J. (2023). *Statehood à la carte in the Caribbean and the Pacific: Secession, regionalism, and postcolonial politics*. Oxford University Press.

Davidson, H. (2017, September 11). France steps up Hurricane Irma aid as UK defends response. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/11/france-steps-up-hurricane-irma-aid-as-uk-defends-response

Davis, S. (2017). Apparatuses of occupation: translocal social movements, states and the archipelagic spatialities of power. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *42*(1), 110-122. https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12152

Dodds, K. (2002). *Pink ice: Britain and the South Atlantic empire*. IB Tauris.

Dutton, J. (2016, February 9). Why Norway may open up spectacular Lofoten archipelago to oil and gas firms. *The Conversation.* http://theconversation.com/why-norway-may-open-up-spectacular-lofoten-archipelago-to-oil-and-gas-firms-54146

Dziedzic, A. (2020). Micronesia (Federated States of Micronesia): Uniting a federal archipelago. In *Handbook of federal countries* (pp. 227-236). Springer.

Elazar, D. J. (1987). *Exploring federalism*. University of Alabama Press.

Elden, S. (2010). Land, terrain, territory. *Progress in Human Geography*, *34*(6), 799-817. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510362603

Esko, A. (2025). The concept of autonomy and the case of Åland Islands. *Tidskrift utgiven av Juridiska Föreningen i Finland (JFT)*, *161*(2-3), 147-166. https://journal.fi/jft/article/view/176306/118670

Fuentes, F. J. M. (2016). Decentralisation, European integration and peripheral nationalism: managing multilevel governance in pseudo-federal Spain. In W. Hofmeister & E. Tayao (Eds.), *Federalism and decentralisation* (pp. 97-117). Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Gazit, N. (2009). Social agency, spatial practices, and power: the micro-foundations of fragmented sovereignty in the occupied territories. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, *22*(1), 83-103.

Georges, R. (2025). Bastion of the still empire: The little secrets of the Virgin Islands. *Callaloo*, *43*(1), 74-82.

Getachew, A. (2019). *Worldmaking after empire: The rise and fall of self-determination*. Princeton University Press.

Ghai, Y. (2008). Territorial options. In J. Darby & R. MacGinty (Eds.), *Contemporary peace making: Conflict, violence and peace processes* (pp. 242-253). Palgrave Macmillan.

Goldfarb, J. C. (2006). *The politics of small things: The power of the powerless in dark times.* The University of Chicago Press.

Grima, A. (2023). *Sea level change and maritime boundaries*. Routledge.

Grydehøj, A. (2016). Navigating the binaries of island independence and dependence in Greenland: decolonisation, political culture, and strategic services. *Political Geography*, *55*(1), 102-112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2016.09.001

Gunter, M. M. (1974). Liechtenstein and the League of Nations: A precedent for the United Nations ministate problem? *American Journal of International Law*, *68*(3), 496-501.

Hepburn, E. (2014). Forging autonomy in a unitary state: The Åland Islands in Finland. *Comparative European Politics*, *12*(4-5), 468-487.
Hepburn, E., and Baldacchino, G. (Eds.). (2016). *Independence movements in subnational island jurisdictions*. Routledge.
Hutcheson, D. S., & McAllister, I. (2021). Consolidating the Putin regime: The 2020 referendum on Russia's constitutional amendments. *Russian Politics*, *6*(3), 355-376.
Ivarature, H. (2025). Bougainville: 'Burukim wara bilong kantri'. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *79*(6), 893–905. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2025.2589355
Keohane, R.O. (2002). Ironies of sovereignty: the European Union and the United States. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *40*(4), 743-765. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00396
Kerr, S. (2005). What is small island sustainable development about? *Ocean & Coastal Management*, *48*(7), 503-524. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2005.03.010
Kim, T. (2025). Maritime (im)mobility and heterotopia: Jeju Island in South Korea. *Kritika Kultura*, *1*(47), 5. https://doi.org/10.13185/1656-152X.2181
Krasner, S. D. (2005). The case for shared sovereignty. *Journal of Democracy*, *16*(1), 69-83.
Kristoffersen, B., Bridge, G., & Steinberg, P. (2021). Time for oil: Competing petro-temporalities in Norway's Lofoten/Vesterålen/Senja archipelago. In F. Polack & D. Farquharson (Eds.), *Cold water oil* (pp. 176-193). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003024125
Kuznetsov, A. S. (2014). *Theory and practice of paradiplomacy: Subnational governments in international affairs*. Routledge.
Lee, K.W. (2013). A reassessment of public conflicts and interests: the case of the Jeju naval base construction. *World Environment and Island Studies*, *3*(2), 63-76.
Leung, M. (2016). 'One country, two systems', 'one city, two systems': citizenship as a stage for politics of mobility and bordering in Hong Kong. *Migration Letters*, *13*(1), 49-63.
Lo, S. (2021). Hong Kong in 2020: National security law and truncated autonomy. *Asian Survey*, *61*(1), 34-42.
Lykkeberg, R. (2026, January 20). Greenland's tragedy: the dream of independence now looks like a trap laid by Donald Trump. *The Guardian (UK).* https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/jan/20/tragedy-greenland-independence-denmark-trump-us
Marks, G., Hooghe, L., Chapman, S. Schakel, A. H., Niedzwiecki, S. and Shair-Rosenfield, S. (2014). *From uniform to differentiated governance*. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2454686
McElroy, J. L., & Pearce, K. B. (2006). The advantages of political affiliation: dependent and independent small-island profiles. *The Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *95*(386), 529-539. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358530600931285
Melin-Soucramanien Commission on the Future of New Caledonia (2022). Commission of the French Senate. https://www.senat.fr/rap/r21-831/r21-83112.html
Milhiet, P. & Panz, P.-C. (2025). New Caledonia: a historic agreement for a unique status. *RSIS Commentaries, 163-25*. https://hdl.handle.net/10356/201758
Milne, D. (2005). Asymmetry in Canada, past and present. *Series Working Paper*. Institute of Policy Studies, Queens University. http://www.queensu.ca/iigr/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.iigrwww/files/files/WorkingPapers/asymmetricfederalism/Milne2005.pdf
Newland, S. A. (2023). Paradiplomacy as a response to international isolation: The case of Taiwan. *The Pacific Review*, *36*(4), 784-812.

Nobbs, C. (2018). Norfolk Island. *The Contemporary Pacific*, *30*(1), 184-191. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/683742

Nobetau, O. (2025, September 1). Bougainville's future: A roadmap for development. Lowly Institute. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/bougainville-s-future-roadmap-development

Ortiz, F. (2014, July 14). Catalan language revival fuels backlash in Spain. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-catalan/catalan-language-revival-fuels-backlash-in-spain-idUSKBN0FJ2E920140714

Otero, J. M., Gulías, E., & Martínez, P. (2025). The emotional dimension of the 2017 Catalan independentist referendum. *Politics & Governance*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9241

Palan, R. (2003). *The offshore world: Sovereign markets, virtual places and nomad millionaires*. Cornell University Press.

Pantojas García, E. (2026). Puerto Rico's seven status plebiscites: The myth of a pro-statehood mandate. *Small States & Territories, 9*(1), 87-96.

Phillips, K. (2016, June 23). The end of Norfolk Island's self-government. *ABC News.* http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/the-end-of-self-government-on-norfolk-island/7530806

Pinaud, C. (2022). *War and genocide in South Sudan*. Cornell University Press.

Pöllath, M. (2018). Revisiting island decolonization: The pursuit of self-government in Pacific island polities under US hegemony. *Island Studies Journal*, *13*(1), 235-250. https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.46

Prinsen, G. (2020). Small, subnational jurisdictions. In G. Baldacchino & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Handbook on the politics of small states* (pp. 362-378). Edward Elgar. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788112932.00033

Regan, A. J., Baker, K., & Oppermann, T. C. (2022). The 2019 Bougainville referendum and the question of independence: From conflict to consensus. *The Journal of Pacific History*, *57*(1), 58-88. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2021.2010683

RFI (2026, June 3). Corsica autonomy plan clears first hurdle in divided French parliament. https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20260603-corsica-autonomy-plan-clears-first-hurdle-in-divided-french-parliament

Roberts, S. (1994). Fictitious capital, fictitious spaces: the geography of offshore financial flows. In S. Corbridge, R. Martin & N. Thrift (Eds.), *Money, power and space* (pp. 91-115). Blackwell.

Rodrigues, I. V. (2023). The Azorean archipelago: The invention of a political region. In S. Richards, R. Schmidt, C. Sanliturk, & F. Palaiologou (Eds.), *Region* (pp. 89-104). Routledge.

Sack, R. D. (1986). *Human territoriality: Its theory and history*. Cambridge University Press.

Salam, D. (2025). The interrelationship between sovereignty, state building, and good governance: the case of Kurdistan. *Democratization*, *32*(3), 638-658.

Sanders, J. (1999). Honest brokers? American and Norwegian facilitation of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, 1991-1993. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, *21*(2), 47-70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41858284

Shaxson, N. (2025). *Treasure islands: The secret world and damaging effects of offshore banking and tax havens*. Macmillan.

Stepan, A. (1999). Federalism and democracy: beyond the U.S. model. *Journal of Democracy, 10*, 19-34.
Strating, R. (2017). Timor-Leste's foreign policy approach to the Timor Sea disputes: pipeline or pipe dream? *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *71*(3), 259-283.
Stuart, K. (2008). A global listing of subnational island jurisdictions. In G. Baldacchino & K. Stuart (Eds.), *Pulling strings: policy insights for Prince Edward Island from other sub-national island jurisdictions* (pp. 175-185). Island Studies Press.
Taylor, P. J. (1994). The state as container: territoriality in the modern world-system. *Progress in Human Geography*, *18*(2), 151-162. https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259401800202
Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S. (2018). A theory of shelter. In *Small states and shelter theory* (pp. 24-58). Routledge.
Vaha, M. (2025). Indigenous values in international law and politics: The perpetual state of Tuvalu. *Small States & Territories, 8*(1), 205–222. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/134816
Veenendaal, W. P. (2016). How democracy functions without parties: The Republic of Palau. *Party Politics*, *22*(1), 27-36. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068813509524
Veenendaal, W. P. (2015). Origins and persistence of federalism and decentralization in microstates. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, *45*(4), 580-604. https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjv017
Vlcek, W (2016). *Offshore finance and global governance.* Springer.
Wathey, C. (2015). The dismantlement of the Netherlands Antilles: how autonomy is more viable than independence. *Caribbean Quilt*, *3*(1), 142-153. https://doi.org/10.33137/caribbeanquilt.v3i1.22621
Watts, R. L. (2015). *Comparing federal political systems*. McGill-Queens University Press.
Watts, R. L. (2013). Typologies of federalism. In *Routledge handbook of regionalism and federalism* (pp. 19-33). Routledge.
Watts, R. L. (1998). Federalism, federal political systems and federations. *Annual Review of Political Science, 1*, 117-137.
Wergin, C. (2012). Trumping the ethnic card: how tourism entrepreneurs on Rodrigues tackled the 2008 financial crisis. *Island Studies Journal*, *7*(1), 119-134.
Winchester, S. (2009). *Outposts: Journeys to surviving relics of the British Empire*. Harper Collins.
Wood, D., and Fels, J. (1992). *The power of maps*. Guilford Press.
Yeo, A. (2013). A base for (in)security? Jeju naval base and competing visions of peace on the Korean Peninsula. In P. Simpson, M. Arakaki & D. Broudy (Eds.), *Under occupation: Resistance and struggle in the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 228-237). Cambridge Scholars Press.
Zellen, B. S. (2025). Greenland during Trump 2.0: Is America poised for an historic Arctic territorial expansion? *The Arctic Institute (Center for Circumpolar Security Studies)*, 12. https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/greenland-during-trump-2-0-america-poised-historic-arctic-territorial-expansion/
Zhang, F., Lou, X., & Ning, Y. (2021). The comparative study of China's mega-city regions: A perspective of competitiveness. *Growth and Change*, *52*(1), 425-442. https://doi.org/10.1111/grow.12422