

# Taiwan's Battle of Recognition

An analysis of the withdrawal of state recognition in practice

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# Abstract

Since 2016, seven countries have withdrawn its recognition of Taiwan which have left the contested state with only fifteen diplomatic allies. Consequently, this affects the democracy of 23 million people, and minimizes Taiwan's ability and cooperation in the global world. The problem derives from when Tsai Ing-wen, the current president of Taiwan and the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was voted in power in 2016. China has since adopted strategies to make alliances switch recognition, intending to isolate Taiwan until "reunification".

This highlights the problem of subjectiveness of state recognition in practice which this thesis aims to investigate. Accordingly, this thesis is a qualitative comparative case study that has employed a theoretical framework of that the practice of recognition stems from power politics and national interests, by looking at the cases of the Dominican Republic and Honduras.

The analysis and discussion explores the underlying factors to why the Dominican Republic withdrew from recognition in 2018, while Honduras still is an ally to Taiwan, by looking at domestic politics and the relation to Great Powers such as China and the U.S. Based on the findings, this thesis argues, within its aims and limitations, that the decision to withdraw recognition from contested states is foremost based on changes in their economic interests, and pressure from Great Powers.

*Key words:* State recognition, Taiwan, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Power Politics, Diplomatic Allies

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## List of Abbreviations

UN	United Nations
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China (Taiwan)
IR	International Relations
DPP	Democratic Progressive Partner
KMT	Kuomintang
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
MOA	Memorandum of Understanding
DR-CAFTA Agreement	Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade

# 1 Introduction

After Tsai Ing-wen was elected as President in Taiwan 2016, seven of Taiwan's then remaining twenty-two allies withdrew their recognition and aligned their diplomatic relations to the People's Republic of China (Hereafter, PRC or China). This has left Taiwan with only being officially recognized by fifteen states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, 2020b). The lack of recognition is problematic in many ways because it prevents the establishment of normal diplomatic and economic relations, membership in international organizations and signing of international treaties and agreements (Tudoroiu, 2017). Further, it limits Taiwan's ability to present its point of view to the global world and makes Taiwan seem way less significant than what it is. Additionally, it also affects Taiwan's democratic rights (Van Fossen, 2007). The current situation stems historically from the conflict between Taiwan and China, and the "one-China Policy" which implies that it is not allowed to both recognize Taiwan and China. Therefore Taiwan is struggling with holding power against the recent developed superpower China. Because of China's new strategy to tempt the alliances of Taiwan with better offers in order to switch recognition, China plays a vital role in the foreign affairs of Taiwan. In light of this, my thesis aims to understand why fifteen countries have remained allies of Taiwan, and what differs between these countries and the seven countries that have withdrawn. To succeed with this, this paper will look into the cases of Honduras and the Dominican Republic. The decision to use those cases will be further explained in the method section. Raising this to a bigger picture, this research attempts to build on recent theorizations of the recognition of contested states in the fields of international relations and foreign diplomacy. This will be done by exploring how domestic politics and the use of power affect decisions of recognition and diplomatic relations.

## 1.1 Purpose and Scope

After summarizing previous research, this paper has found that there are no clear rules regarding recognition in practice, and therefore every country decides whether to recognize or not in accordance with its own national interests. Hence, this thesis will argue that the decision to recognize is political and originates in that the recognition of Great Powers serves as a focal point for other countries to follow (Coggins, 2014; Stojanovska-Stefanova, Atanasoski and Chachorovski, 2017; Rrahmani, 2018). This will be discussed further in the section of the theoretical framework. With this thesis, the aim is not to explore what the guiding principles of state recognition *should* be, rather why do states in *practice* actually choose to recognize, or specifically choose to withdraw recognition from a contested state. Here, the question of power emerges. The final decisions to recognize or withdraw from recognition might stem from ideology or normative considerations that states have, but odds are that they are also taking their own self-interests into account (Grant, 1999; Coggins, 2014). Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to research what factors in particular it is that shapes a country's national interests. Is it related to trade, foreign aid or diplomatic relations with other states, mainly Great Powers? Building on the previous research, the purpose of this thesis is to offer an explanation of why two relatively similar countries choose to take different paths when it comes to the recognition of Taiwan as an independent state. The section that follows will introduce the background of the current issue. This thesis is an attempt to raise the question about Taiwan's current situation, which hopefully will open space for future discussion about underlying rationales to why Taiwan keeps losing allies. Hence, the guiding question for this research is:

*Why do some countries withdraw recognition from contested states?*

In order to answer this comprehensive question, this thesis will be looking into the relationship with the Dominican Republic, which withdrew from the recognition of Taiwan in 2018, and Honduras which is a remaining ally of Taiwan. This will be further explained in the section of case selection. In accordance, a broader theoretical debate about the withdrawal of state recognition in practice will be investigated. The chosen theory and collection of data have develop a hypothesis for this thesis:

*H1: Countries will base their decision to recognize contested states foremost on their economic interests*

This will lay the foundation for this specific research within the limited aims and scope of this thesis.

## 1.2 Background

The one-China policy stems originally from when the Nationalist government and its ruling party Kuomintang (KMT) fled to Taiwan to reestablish the Republic of China (ROC) after losing the Chinese Civil War on mainland China in 1949. They then fought with the Chinese Communist government on the mainland to represent the State of China in the international arena. For decades the KMT ruled the ROC as an authoritarian state, but in the 1990s Taiwan adopted multiparty elections which developed into the flourishing current democracy. Both sides claimed that it was only one China which back then included the island of Taiwan. However, today Taiwan no longer claims to represent the mainland (Hamilton, 2003; Chiang and Hwang, 2008; Yip, 2020). In 1992, a historical meeting was held in Hongkong between the PRC and ROC where it was agreed that there is only one China. However, China and Taiwan are both interpreting the meaning of this according to their own definition. The meeting gave birth to the term 1992 Consensus, even though the outcome is defined differently (Wang *et al.*, 2019).

When it comes to foreign relations, Taiwan has been struggling in the last couple of years. President Tsai Ing-wen was elected in 2016 together with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Tsai Ing-wen and DPP have chosen a more restrictive policy towards China compared to the last running President Ma Ying-jeou and the former ruling party Kuomintang (KMT), who previously have maintained a pro-China strategy. China still sees Taiwan as a breakaway province and is doing everything in their power to exclude Taiwan from the international arena (Hamilton, 2003; Wang *et al.*, 2019). A result of this is that seven countries have withdrawn from the recognition of Taiwan, namely; São Tomé and Príncipe, Panama, The Dominican Republic, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Solomon Islands, and Kiribati (See Figure 1.1 below). The main reason behind the withdrawal is because of establishing diplomatic relations with China. Because of the one-China policy and the 1992 Consensus, recognizing both Taiwan and China is forbidden. Hence, the reasoning of Taiwan struggling with holding power against the superpower China. President Tsai acknowledges the 1992 Consensus, however, she refuses to accept it (Wang *et al.*, 2019).

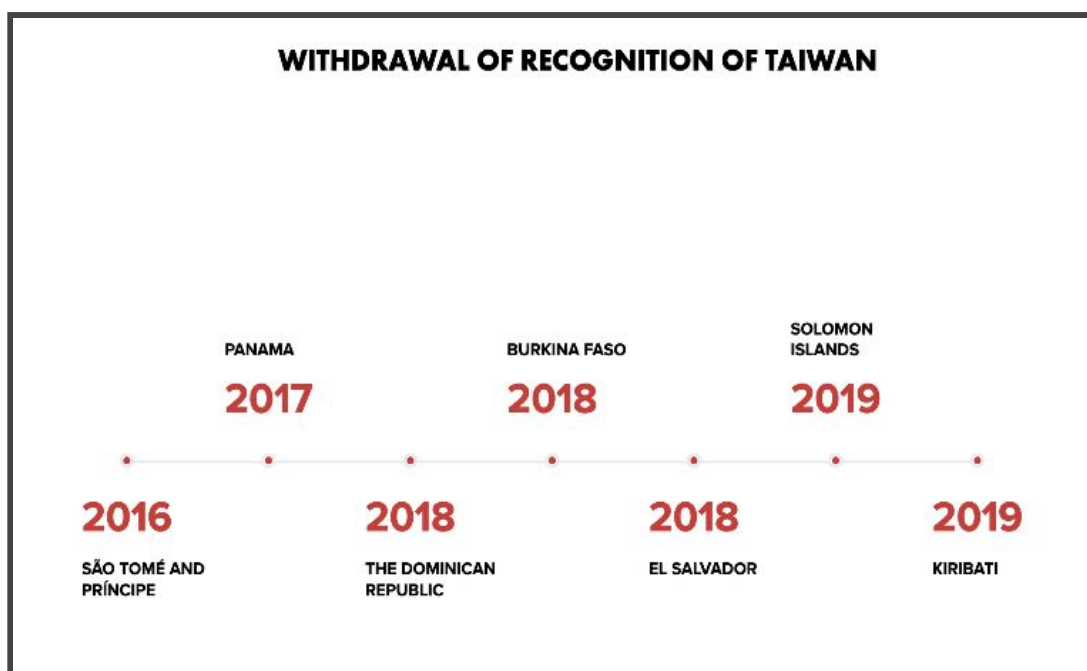




Figure 1.1 Countries that have withdrawn from the recognition of Taiwan since 2016. Source: Figure developed by the author of this thesis.

Today, Taiwan no longer competes for the right to represent China in the international arena, instead they present themselves to be Taiwan (Chiang and Hwang, 2008). Despite this, they are only recognized as an independent state by fifteen countries because of the one-China policy (Yip, 2020). The remaining countries recognizing Taiwan as an independent state are; the Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, Palau, Tuvalu, Eswatini, Holy See, Belize, Haiti, Nicaragua, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Republic of Guatemala, Republic of Honduras, Republic of Paraguay, and Saint Lucia ([MOFA, ROC \(Taiwan\) 2020](#)). Hence, Mainland China and the one-China policy represents the biggest challenge in Taiwan's current diplomatic work (Lee, 2016; Yip, 2020). Therefore, the conflict with China is an important background knowledge of this thesis when examining the foreign relations of Taiwan.

Leading on from that, this thesis will focus on the withdrawal of recognition after 2016 in order to have a timeline to conform to. Taiwan's allies are today mainly located in Latin America and Oceania, and the withdrawals after 2016 are from both continents, but also from the African continent (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, 2020b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, 2020a) Thus, it is difficult to see a general pattern by only looking at continents. Because of this, this thesis will look specifically at Honduras, a remaining ally of Taiwan, and the Dominican Republic who withdrew from recognition in 2018. These two countries have had diplomatic relations with Taiwan since 1941 and 1942 respectively, both are located in Latin America, they are equal in terms of population and are both ranked "partly free" on the democracy index by Freedom House ('Freedom House', no date; Shih, 2012; Foreign Press Liaison Office, 2018). In order to draw any conclusions, the domestic politics in each country needs to be explored to see if any patterns can be found of drivers to the decisions, seeing that there could be

many potential factors as to why these countries choose to recognize or not recognize.

State recognition is in many ways crucial because of its notable effects. The lack of recognition will prevent membership in international organizations and the establishment of economic and diplomatic relations (Tudoroiu, 2017). The Montevideo Convention is the most widely accepted source of what a state defines as and is built upon four criteria and should possess the following qualifications; a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states ('Montevideo Convention', 1933; Grant, 1999). The Montevideo convention lays out a foundation of the criteria of statehood in international law in which Taiwan applies to; Taiwan has a robust economy set around its own currency, a military capacity to defend its established territorial boundaries, an independent foreign policy, and a democratically elected government. Hence, Taiwan qualifies as a state under international law (Hamilton, 2003; Chiang and Hwang, 2008; Alexander, 2014).

### 1.3 Literature review

When scrutinizing and dismantling previous literature and research, it has shown that the field of state recognition and statehood has been thoroughly discussed and debated. It has been argued by scholars that sovereignty originally comes from the location of supreme power within a particular territorial unit, and does usually come from within and do not require the recognition of other states (Crawford, 2007). Previous research shows that recognition has been debated as a matter of doctrine, and has been described as either declaratory or constitutive statehood from the Montevideo Convention in 1933. However, the Montevideo Convention stems originally from the fields of international law and is therefore not always appropriate in the field of political science (Grant, 1999). Despite this, it provides a foundation for the criteria of statehood in which each state should possess the following qualifications; a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states

(‘Montevideo Convention’, 1933). As already mentioned, this is the most widely accepted source of statehood as a definition (Grant, 1999). From the Montevideo Convention, the declaratory and the constitutive theories are two normative developed approaches that have demonstrated the debate about statehood and the recognition of states. This will be explained more thoroughly below.

The constitutive theory is the standard nineteenth-century model and stresses recognition by other countries as instrumental for statehood. In other words, a state exists exclusively via recognition by other states (Stojanovska-Stefanova et al, 2017). Accordingly, recognition provides legitimacy to emerging states, supporting their sovereignty. Recognition by other states is the key essential for being defined as a state within the international sphere, therefore, this approach argues that there is no state until there is no international recognition (Teorell, 2017; Stokes, 2019). However, the constitutive theory has been criticized for its susceptibility to political manipulation and logical inconsistency in the case of partial recognition by some states (Chiang and Hwang, 2008).

The declaratory theory was developed in the twentieth century to address shortcomings of the constitutive theory. It proposes that the act of recognition is political rather than legal (Holmberg Forsyth, 2012). Here, an entity becomes a state as soon as it meets the minimal criteria for statehood. A legal status attaching to a specific state of affairs, for example by signing treaties or living up to certain internationally established conventions, like the Montevideo treaty (Teorell, 2017). According to Hwang and Chiang (2008), in line with this approach, recognition does not create the state, instead it confirms that an entity has reached statehood (Chiang and Hwang, 2008). However, the issue of statehood is still problematic and does not fully apply in practice as we can see with Taiwan. If the declaratory theory would have been legitimate by that an entity becomes a state as soon as it meets the minimal criteria for statehood it should have been applicable to the case of Taiwan (Ediger, 2018).

Holmberg Forsyth (2012) argues that the focal point of contention between these two approaches is the question of whether it is law or fact (politics) that determines statehood (Holmberg Forsyth, 2012). This is where the criticism of the Montevideo Convention has been, for not addressing where recognition falls along the spectrum between law and politics (Grant, 1999). In this comprehensive debate *de jure* and *de facto* recognition (states) takes up quite some space as well. *De jure* is by law and follows with official documents. This method does not leave room for any interpretation. On the other hand, the *de facto* (also known as contested states) method is establishing other types of relations such as cultural, economic or political but without official legal documents. A *de facto* state is described by Stojanovska-Stefanova et al. (2017) as an entity that has a territory, population and sovereignty but lacks recognition to legitimately manage the population by a larger number of countries. The *de facto* country has usually been part of another country that challenged and oppressed its sovereignty, which in many ways reminds of Taiwan (Stojanovska-Stefanova et al, 2017; Ker-Lindsay and Berg, 2018).

Additionally, it has been argued that the recognition of one country on the international level is reflected through its membership in international organizations, such as in the United Nations (UN) (Tudoroiu, 2017). However, the Vatican City is not a member of the UN, and Switzerland became a member first in 2002 but are still recognized as states (Grant, 1999). This is problematic for Taiwan, since in order to become a member of this international institution it is necessary to be recognized by the five member-countries of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), USA, China, Russia, Great Britain and France without whose decision (resolution) membership is not possible. This implies that for Taiwan it will be an ongoing struggle with becoming a member of the UN because of China's veto (Stojanovska-Stefanova et al, 2017).

In sum, the problem with the great mass of previous research is that it does not raise the issue of states losing recognition and how it actually occurs in practice.

However, there is one scholar that raises the issue of a gap between theory and practice which stems from leaders' political interests and decisions (Coggins, 2014; Tudoroiu, 2017). Now, with this previous literature as the foundation, it makes sense to settle this thesis somewhere in the middle of previous understandings of political science and international law. Primarily because this is a study of political science, but the understanding of international law is crucial for the concept of state recognition. Above all, it is the practice of recognition of statehood that will be the focal point in this paper which will be further elaborated in the section of the theoretical framework. Therefore, the section that follows will introduce the theoretical lens of the practice of state recognition, which will provide the current and epistemological position of this research that will allow comparative analysis and discussion.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical debate about the definition of statehood has been ongoing for many years. It has been discussed in the fields of international law and political science whether it is about legality or facts (politics) (Grant, 1999). This paper has tried to get a broader grasp of the literature with focus on *recognition*, to identify the theoretical discussion in this field, and what it is that drives countries to recognize each other. Coggins (2014) argues in her book *Power Politics and State Formation in the Twentieth Century: The Dynamics of Recognition* that the normative standards to state creation prescribed by international law are not followed in practice. Hence, there is an existing gap between theory and practice. Additionally, she claims that this gap is not because of misperception inherent to meeting the abstract ideal, but rather that leaders actively oppose these standards implied by law in order to secure and maintain their own interests (Coggins, 2014). Self-interest and power dynamics creep into the process when leaders use the opportunity to select new peers. Further, she argues that the capabilities of Great Powers' give them substantial influence over other states' behavior to recognize or not do so (Coggins, 2014). Hence, the theoretical framework that the act of statehood is political, and that power is a great source of reliability when it comes to the recognition of states will be used in this thesis. As already mentioned in the literature review, there is an extensive amount of research papers about the Montevideo Convention and the declaratory and constitutive theory. However, it has been argued that previous literature has managed to create a *tertium quid* which refers to a third unidentified element that is combined with two known ones; in this example, the declaratory and constitutive theories. This is because recognition and statehood still are blurry and subjective (Grant, 1999; Ajonye, 2009).

Therefore, the theoretical framework in this thesis will follow from what has been developed by Bridget Coggins (2014) about statehood and recognition in theory and practice, with the focal point in the latter. In light of this, the theory used as a guideline in this thesis is as follows: countries withdraw their recognition from contested states when their national interests change or when they are pressured from Great Powers to do so. Neither does this paper, nor Bridget Coggins (2014) challenge the normative and legal theories of statehood and recognition, but what is suggested is that the focus should be more drawn to the practice of recognition. International lawyers and leaders have agreed that recognition is motivated by political considerations and interests instead of international law (Grant, 1999; Coggins, 2014). However, it does not totally disregard territorial control and governmental capacity (Coggins, 2014). In order to add diligence to previous theories when employing national interest, my aim with this framework is to achieve an understanding of what kind of domestic interests that affect and influence a states' decision to recognize or in this case, withdraw from recognition. In other words, what factors in particular shape those interests. This is why I have chosen this theory, seeing that the aim is to look at underlying factors as to why some countries (the Dominican Republic especially) have withdrawn from the recognition of Taiwan as an independent state. In this particular case, it would not be sufficient to use the constitutive nor the declaratory theory because the case of Taiwan is beyond the limits of those theories.

In Coggins (2014) theory, she developed three different strands for potential motives for recognition; external/geostrategic security, domestic security, and system stability. When explaining these three categories a bit further *External Security* is about that security is one of the most fundamental compulsions of a state which can be one potential motive behind recognition. Each leader should therefore weigh any potential factors with reference to the own country's situation of security, determining if a new ally would be of a positive or negative effect. Through this method, recognition can be used to protect and strengthen

themselves, but also to weaken their enemies (Coggins, 2011). *Domestic security* is the second potential motive Coggins (2011 & 2014) brings up, arguing that if a country's domestic survival is under threat, state leaders might consider support for secessionists. As Coggins (2014) puts it "A government conferring legitimacy on a secessionist movement in a foreign state potentially sends a signal supporting secessionism's legitimacy at home" (Coggins, 2014:47). *System Stability* is about the Great Powers and the most likely result of them upholding status quo when disagreeing, and if they are more likely to recognize secessionists when other Great Powers are doing so (Coggins, 2011 & 2014). Therefore, this framework will help establish the core of this thesis. In order to apply this frame to Taiwan and the cases of the Dominican Republic who withdrew in 2018, and Honduras who still is an ally of Taiwan, I will first present the methodology of this thesis, which will then be followed by the analysis of the chosen cases.



## 3 Methodology

This section is dedicated to presenting the research design and strategy of the study. It summarises the choice of qualitative research design and proceeds to explain and motivate what methods I have chosen to work with this research.

### 3.1 Research Design

To get an understanding of the withdrawal of state recognition, this thesis is conducted as a comparative case study, where the practice of recognition (withdrawal of) offers the explanatory frame (Creswell, 2013). According to Bryman (2012), a case study is a detailed analysis of a case, which gives a possibility to grasp its character and complexity. Further, as specified by Bryman (2012), in the collection of analysis and data, a qualitative study emphasizes words rather than quantification (Bryman, 2012). Hence, it is the most appropriate research design for the aim of this thesis. The cases of Honduras and the Dominican Republic will be used as dependent variables to get an understanding of the variation to why Honduras still is an ally of Taiwan, while the Dominican Republic no longer is. The method of doing case study allows the researcher to investigate and analyze processes in-depth (Creswell, 2013). As such, the withdrawal of recognition in practice, and what potential factors that navigate decision-making will remain as the ‘ultimate’ unit of analysis. With this in mind, this thesis hopes to reveal variations of structural elements in the decision whether to withdraw from the recognition of a contested state or not (Lijphart, 1971).

Being aware of the limits of this design, I believe that following the theory developed by Coggins (2014) of state-recognition in practice and the comparative case of Honduras and the Dominican Republic will provide the necessary foundation to get a perception of Taiwan’s current situation. This will hopefully

contribute to the understanding of what the underlying national interests are to why countries choose to withdraw from the recognition of Taiwan. In particular, what factors shape those interests. Further, I am fully aware that the results of this study might not be adaptable to the other countries that have withdrawn from Taiwan's recognition since 2016, nor other contested states in similar situations as Taiwan. However, bearing this limitation with me through this study, I hope the outcome will pave the way for a path, in which I seek to identify a pattern that can be connected to the analysis of state recognition, or more specifically the withdrawal of recognition in practice.

### 3.2 Case selection

Latin America has become a battleground where several struggling nations have ended up in a dispute between China and Taiwan (Erikson and Chen, 2007). Since the beginning of the 2000s, Latin American exports to China have grown more than six-fold, reaching around USD 60 billion in 2006. Today, major Latin American countries have already switched recognition to China, and those who remain have smaller populations and weaker economies (Erikson and Chen, 2007). In this thesis, I have chosen Taiwan as the foundation to emanate from because of its prominence. Yet, in order to find what kind of underlying factors that shape a nation's interest to recognize or not, I decided to choose Honduras and the Dominican Republic to explore the reasons why the Dominican Republic has chosen to withdraw after seventy-seven years of diplomatic relations with Taiwan, when Honduras still remains an ally. I have chosen these two Latin American countries out of four main reasons; 1. Both countries are located in Central America and the Caribbean, relatively close to each other; 2. They are equal in terms of population; 3. They are both ranked as partly free by the Freedom House index; 4. Their diplomatic relations have been ongoing for the same amount of time (both initiated diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1941 and 1942) ('Freedom House', no date; Shih, 2012; Foreign Press Liaison Office, 2018).

As already established, state recognition in practice has been chosen to investigate the core functions. If we want to understand what it is that makes a country sever from recognition, it is crucial to understand what it is that makes a country recognize other states too. Hence, the analysis will explore what underlying factors that shape a country's national interests.

### 3.3 Data collection

This thesis will be built on a diverse set of empirical material to form an objective and comprehensive analysis to present itself in a conclusion. The material in this thesis is built from document analysis and comprises mainly secondary sources such as national and international newspapers, academic articles and books, institutional and organizational reports. LUBsearch and Google Scholar have been used for keyword search to find relevant academic literature. The data has been analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, some primary sources have been used such as diplomatic reports from government websites. However, the research has been somewhat limited since I do not speak either Mandarin or Spanish. Due to this limitation, the analysis relies heavily on secondary material and does therefore not aim to establish a wide generalizable result which will be closely discussed in the limitations section. This paper aims to present a reasoned analysis based on the specific framework and chosen material while being conscious of the different limitations (Bryman, 2012).

### 3.4 Limitations

When trying to implement the theoretical framework for this thesis I was having issues finding the right one to adapt. Comprehensive research has been done in the fields of recognition and statehood. However, attempts were made to search for a theory that would explain the practice of recognition, and the specific and quite unusual case of withdrawal by looking at other contested states with a

similar situation, such as Kosovo or Palestine. It took quite some time and a great amount of reading before appropriate previous research could be found that touched upon the practice of recognition. Additionally, a significant limitation that can not go unmentioned is the use of secondary data and its quality, as it can be hard to verify. Even if it might come across as official it does not need to be credible if the government has motives to publish selective, false or distorted data in order to support a point of view. Conducting a document analysis can be time convenient but the data can also be protected or inaccessible to the public (Creswell, 2013; Scheyvens, 2014). However, to minimize this limitation comprehensive research has been done on different types of sources to leave out biases and increase the credibility. As described in Creswell (2013), this method can be used to examine evidence from a source and then use it to build a coherent justification for themes. However, this paper would be even more credible if a triangulation method would be used where interviews and observations also could be included (Creswell, 2013). Nevertheless, within the scope and timeframe of this bachelor's thesis, this is a limitation that needs to be considered through this paper. Another limitation with big impact is regarding language. When trying to source proper data about domestic politics in Taiwan, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic, this paper has come across difficulties to find material available in English. In some cases, governmental websites have even been blocked. Nevertheless, it is believed that this thesis has gotten the adequate data which has been translated in a proper manner to answer the research question of this thesis. Regardless, this thesis is aware that the information that has been inaccessible to access, for instance clear governmental statements on other underlying reasons to the decision-making of withdrawal of recognition, could have a possibility of pushing the evidence in a different direction.

## 4 Empirical Analysis

The analysis will start by extracting the data by dividing the chosen cases to a sub-section each, starting with the role of the Great Powers. Each section will hold background information of the chosen case and empirical material connected to the positioning of the case within the practice of state recognition. The previously established question *Why do some countries withdraw recognition from contested states?* and the theoretical framework of countries withdrawing the recognition from contested states when their national interests change or when they are pressured from Great Powers, will guide the analysis of each case. Therefore, the first section will work as an introduction to analyze the role of the U.S and China because of their influence and importance as Great Powers in diplomatic relations, hence the recognition of contested states. Regardless of the outcome of the analysis, the empirical evidence will be presented in its purest form. After the analysis, a discussion will follow on how these cases can be connected within the theoretical framework.

### 4.1 The role of Great Powers; China and the U.S

When analyzing the data it was found that the foreign relations of Taiwan are deeply involved in the relations of China and the U.S. The increasing conflict of power between the two superpowers China and the U.S has shown to affect the foreign relations of Taiwan and its allies. Inequalities are enhanced due to the gap in the existing literature of the practice of recognition and the absence of legal rights to statehood. Accordingly, it leaves the powerless behind (in this case Taiwan) and the powerful to navigate the game by their rules. Hence, legitimization is influenced deliberately by the views of powerful organizations such as the UN, and the most powerful countries such as China and the U.S.

Therefore, Great Power recognition serves as guiding lines which other countries then follow. This in turn leads to legitimacy that becomes system-wide. When leaders are given the possibility to select new peers, self-interest and power dynamics inescapably steer the process (Coggins, 2014). Consequently, superpowers may lend their powers to others by recognizing, or conversely take away their power by withdrawing from recognition. All of this is deeply affected by political power which becomes problematic. The case of Kosovo is similar, however, its claim to statehood has been supported by major actors (Ajonye, 2009).

The data shows that when China has become a rival to the U.S, China is trying to mark more territory to grow even bigger and powerful. In the past decade, China has established ties with a handful of countries in the Caribbean and Latin America. Costa Rica switched from Taiwan in 2007, Panama in 2017 and both El Salvador and the Dominican Republic in 2018 (Castillo, 2019). El Salvador justified its decision because of the development of its economy (Wallace, 2018). With China seeking allies in Latin America and the Caribbean, they are consequently intensifying the competition in the backyard of America. The Caribbean and Latin American states might use the partnership with China as a method of hedging against the dominance of the U.S, same way as some Asian countries are doing to the U.S towards the growing power of China (Hsiang, 2018). The data shows that Chinese imports from Latin America have in the past years grown substantially. Already as early as between the year 2000 and 2006 the numbers grew by 60 percent a year, almost more than six-fold (Erikson and Chen, 2007; Ajonye, 2009). Additionally, with the Chinese government establishing their presence early in Latin America with activities through students, visitors and other companies, made them build up relations even before diplomatic relations were signed.

Today, not a single major economy in Latin America such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile or Argentina, maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Many of the

countries in Latin America have been struggling financially and with achieving successful integration into the world economy. Hence, because of their eagerness to maximize economic gains, it has been an easy choice to recognize PRC who have more resources than Taiwan to offer (Erikson and Chen, 2007; Ajonye, 2009). The membership and use of veto in the UN are playing a dominant role here too, however, it is another discussion to probe. Nevertheless, an example worth mentioning is that China has since 2004 used its troop contribution and veto in the UNSC as an apparatus to lever Haiti away from their relations with Taiwan. China has for several times used its power and influence to block oppositions in order to secure its own goals or interests, as well as to block out those countries that recognize Taiwan. The more powerful a state is, the more pronounced effect it has on the occurrences in the international arena (Erikson and Chen, 2007; Ajonye, 2009).

The U.S has a long record of exerting influence in Latin America and the Caribbean where they also have been an important partner in different development projects (Brigida, 2019). The U.S response to China has sharpened since Donald Trump took office. As a consequence of some Latin American and Caribbean countries switching recognition from Taiwan to China, the U.S recalled their ambassadors to El Salvador, Panama and the Dominican Republic. Additionally, they penalized El Salvador by cutting their financial aid after their withdrawal. These actions were a clear message sent from the U.S about them taking a stance behind Taiwan's diplomatic relations (Beech, 2018a; Shattuck, 2020; U.S. Embassy Panama City, 2018). The chargé d'affaires of the U.S Embassy in the Dominican Republic regret the decision made and pointed out that with Taiwan the Dominican Republic had an important source of stability (Jiménez, 2018). The U.S has previously warned that what China is doing is a method of putting poor countries in debt to increase its influence, but it needs to be remembered that China and the U.S are in conflict (EFE, 2018). Tying this back to the theory and research question, the data identifies the significant influence by Great Powers.

## 4.1 Taiwan's Foreign Relations

Taiwan has become one of the top donors among developing countries and newly industrialized states (Tudoroiu, 2017). Taiwan is classified as one of the so-called Asian Tigers because of its quick development and it has the 22nd biggest economy in the world and is the 9th biggest trading partner to the U.S (Hamilton, 2003; BBC News, 2018a). It has been argued before that it is not by chance that the diplomatic allies of Taiwan are poor, underdeveloped and in debt. These countries are more vulnerable and in more need of foreign aid. Thus, they are an easier target to create diplomatic relations with, but also easier to lose to greater powers with more financial attributes (Stojanovska-Stefanova et al, 2017). This has resulted in small states switching sides when better conditions and deals are offered, and whoever writes the biggest check wins. As Von Fossen (2007) is describing in his article, the anti-communist kingdom of Tonga switched recognition to the PRC from ROC in 1998 because of economic motives, and out of fear that PRC would use its veto in the UN towards Tonga's membership application if they retained diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Van Fossen, 2007; Stojanovska-Stefanova et al, 2017; Shattuck, 2020). However, allegations of corruption come from both sides. The history of Taiwan's foreign relations occasionally has been criticized for not being transparent. The data shows that certain financial gifts from Taiwan have in previous years been at the center of corruption scandals too (Erikson and Chen, 2007; Van Fossen, 2007; Alexander, 2014). Below (Figure 4.1) is an example of an explanation that explains opportunity structures of recognition which indicates that recognition is shaped by larger political structures and power politics that help to explain outcomes of political recognition. Hence, it is a good explanation that ties in to the theory that decisions to recognize or not are connected to the impact of Great Powers.



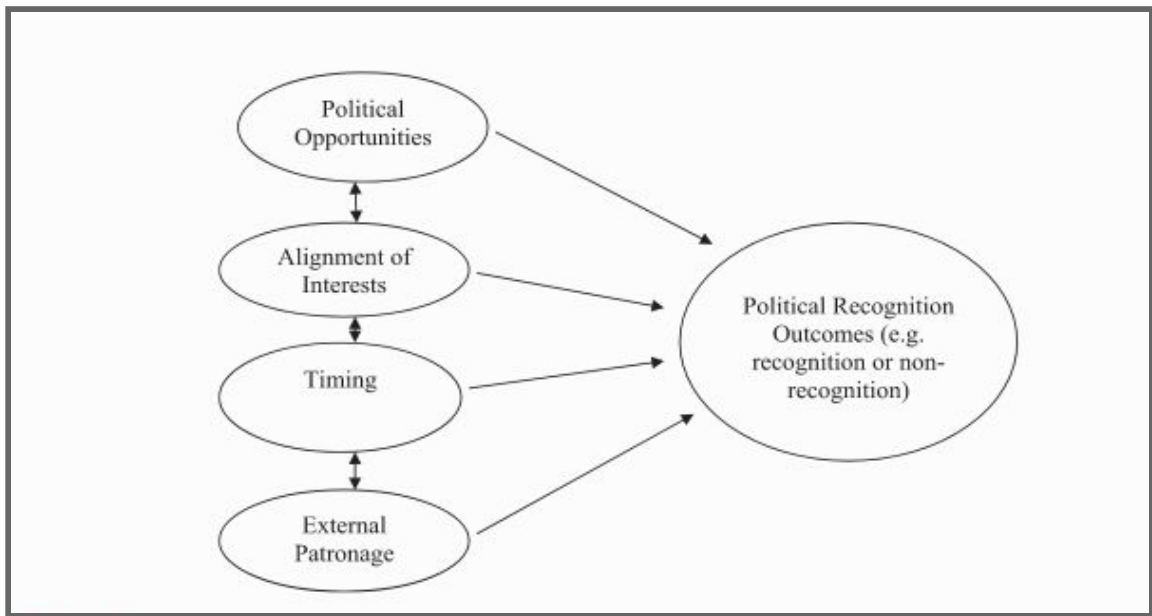


Figure 4.1 Source: (Stokes, 2019)

Taiwan has an extensive amount of trade relations with countries that are not diplomatic allies to Taiwan (Shattuck, 2020). What might be an important deal-breaker in their foreign affairs is its relation with the Great Power the U.S. In April this year, the U.S signed the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act (TAIPEI ACT). This signifies that the U.S can and will take into consideration the reduction of diplomatic, economic and security commitments of other nations that take active measures to undermine Taiwan. The act further states that it is in the policy of the U.S to preserve and promote commercial, cultural and other relations between the people of Taiwan and the U.S. Additionally, the U.S should resist any attempt to force or coercion from other states that would hurt Taiwan. Further, the act claims that “Taiwan is a free, democratic and prosperous nation of 23,000,000 people and an important contributor to peace and stability around the world” (Sputnik, 2018; Diario, 2020; Gardner, 2020:1 §3).

#### 4.2 The Case of the Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic with a population of 10 million, located in Latin America and the Caribbean has a democracy that ranks partly free according to

Freedom House (2020) and has a score of 28/100, where 100 is the best, in the Transparency Corruption Index (BBC News, 2018a; *Corruption Perception Index*, 2019, 'Freedom House', no date). The Dominican Republic shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, which still is a diplomatic ally of Taiwan (BBC News, 2018a). Already in 2016, the Dominican Republic's relation to China started increasing and becoming more intense. On May 1 2018, the Dominican Republic announced that they severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan and thus broke the eight-decades long relationship to instead recognize China. Here, it is interesting to investigate why this has not happened earlier. The new relationship with China would allow huge potential for the development of the Dominican Republic, argued President Medina of the Dominican Republic (Castillo, 2019). The minister of foreign affairs in the Dominican Republic claimed that the change of recognition was about trade, investments, tourism and education (Fontdeglòria, 2018). Hence, this strengthens the theory that decisions are made out of national interests, in this case specifically economic interests.

The geographical condition of the Dominican Republic seems to be an advantage for China because of its proximity to the coast, to Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Panama Canal (El Nacional, 2018). The official diplomatic relations document signed between the Dominican Republic and China would comprise different legal agreements such as; stipends for students, memorandum of understanding (MOU) and cooperation for sports cooperation, civil aviation cooperation agreement, MOU between the Ministry of Finance and the China Development Bank, MOU between the Ministry of Finance and the Import and Export Bank of China. Further, in December 2018 the two countries signed fourteen purchase projects for more than USD 90 million (The Caribbean Council, 2018a, 2018b; Mejía, 2019). In a press conference in Beijing, a representative to the Dominican Republic stressed that China has in the past grown to become its second-largest supplier with an annual commercial exchange of around USD 2 billion even without diplomatic relations (Fontdeglòria, 2018; Redacción, 2018). Henceforth, this has led to the switch from Taiwan. Furthermore, the Dominican Republic got

a seat in the UNSC in 2018, after establishing diplomatic relations with China (United Nations Security Council, 2018; teleSUR, 2019). This seems like a strong motive to switch recognition and ties back to the power politics.

The president of the Dominican Republic said in November 2018 that it is of high interest to increase their exports to China because of the large and dynamic market in China (Castillo, 2019). China's large-scale work with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has expanded and is now including even Latin America. After Panama switched recognition in 2017, they were the first Latin American country to sign a cooperation agreement regarding the BRI. After Panama, other Latin American countries have followed such as Chile, Ecuador, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic showed great enthusiasm to join the BRI, starting with the establishment of diplomatic relations. BRI could be beneficial for Latin America because of its opportunity to unite the world through infrastructure, and improving economic development. The establishment of BRI in Latin America has led to China being the third biggest investor in the region (Koop, 2019; Jianrong, 2018). Other than that, the Dominican Republic received its first major loan from China in 2018 equivalent to USD 600 million. This package was meant for electricity transmission projects and was given with an extra low interest rate after the Dominican Republic switched allies to China from Taiwan (Soutar, 2019). Taiwan claims that the Dominican Republic was offered a package of USD 3.1 billion of investment and loans to withdraw from the recognition of Taiwan. At the same time China is claiming that there were not any economic pre-conditions. The U.S stated that several Latin American countries were engaging in transactions that lack transparency when deepening their relations to "unfamiliar partners" (Pineda, 2018).

The Dominican Republic has for many years had close ties with the U.S because of the extensive trade and remittances coming from the U.S that account for approximately 5-7% of the Dominican Republic's national income (BBC News, 2016; Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). The U.S and the Dominican Republic

(together with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras) have a comprehensive trade agreement called DR-CAFTA which is of big importance for the Dominican Republic where the bilateral trade comprises almost all sectors. Additionally, the largest concentration of Dominicans abroad resides in the U.S (Gov, 2019; Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). However, after President Trump harshened the policies against immigration, tensions between the U.S and Latin American countries have flared (Pineda, 2018; Shattuck, 2020).

Interpreting the data after the three criteria developed by Coggins (2014), the motive of external security implies that there is a possibility of Dominican Republic sending a message to the U.S by establishing relations with China and thus, strengthening China's position and solidifying their own security. It might be that China is more flexible regarding its foreign policy where it prioritizes economy over ideology and its aid and financial packages come with less conditions to follow (Wallace, 2018). Concerning domestic security, this criteria might not be as relevant when interpreting the collected data attributable to the fact that the Dominican Republic is a relatively stable country with one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America in the last years (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). Hence, they are not that vulnerable. System stability is foremost about the Great Powers' actions if they agree or disagree on secessionism, but applying it to the case of the Dominican Republic, the data reads as the Dominican Republic is challenging its relation to the U.S. Nonetheless, tying this back to the theory that countries choose to withdraw recognition from contested states when their national interests change or when they are pressured from Great Powers to do so, the data presents itself to be clear in line with the theoretical framework and hypothesis. The Dominican Republic has been offered more money from China, numbers that Taiwan was unable to provide (Erikson and Chen, 2007; Castillo, 2019). The data shows that the underlying reason for why this happened first in 2018 and not earlier might depend on the change of the U.S president in 2016 to the Trump Administration and their change of policies towards Latin American countries (Soutar, 2019; Shattuck, 2020).

### 4.3 The Case of Honduras

Located next to Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua lies Honduras with its nine million people. Honduras is ranked 146 of 180 countries by the Transparency Corruption Index with a score of 26/100 and ranked partly free on the democracy index by Freedom House (*Corruption Perception Index*, 2019, 'Freedom House', no date). Corruption, poverty and military rule have been the story of Honduras for a long time where democratic institutions are fragile and the highest violent crime rates exist (BBC News, 2018b; Meyer, 2020). As a result, and in contrast to the Dominican Republic, Honduras is one of the most unstable and least developed countries in Latin America. Diplomatic relations were established with Taiwan in 1941, and Honduras and Taiwan have maintained a good relationship with a collaborative focus on education, agriculture, and healthcare (Ramos, 2019). In 2017 and 2018, rumors circulated about Honduras leaving Taiwan after Panama, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador left Taiwan for China. However, there was no official decision to break the ties, and according to the Honduran ambassador, the relations between the countries were secure and would continue (Chai and Lin, 2017; Strong, 2018). At the end of 2019, a loan of USD 300 million from Taiwan to Honduras was confirmed. The aim of the loan is to strengthen the infrastructure in health and education (Pei-ju, 2019). Despite that, the future remains contingent.

The U.S presence in Honduras goes long back. The Obama Administration launched a new strategy to engage in Central America to improve security, the economy and strengthen the governance. Investment and trade relations are well established and have become more robust after the implementation of the DR-CAFTA in 2006. This agreement eliminates tariffs and other barriers and creates more transparent rules for their business. The economy of Honduras depends heavily on remittances and trade from the U.S (*Central America: Honduras*, 2020; Meyer, 2020). Since 2016, the U.S Congress has allocated at least USD 507.6 million dollars to Honduras (Brigida, 2019; Meyer, 2020). In

2018, the bilateral trade between Honduras and the U.S was estimated at a total of USD 12.3 billion (Gov, 2020). Honduras receives most imports from the U.S, but China's export to Honduras accounted for the second biggest (OEC, 2018; The World Bank, 2018). The Trump Administration maintained the same strategy as the Obama Administration, but have scaled back the amount of foreign aid. In 2019 most foreign aid to Honduras was suspended by the Trump Administration due to increased immigration and asylum-seekers from Honduras and other Central American countries to the U.S. Further, the total number of beneficiaries of aid activities in Honduras fell to 700,000 in 2020 compared to 1.5 million in 2019 (Meyer, 2020).

Analyzing the data after the three criteria of state recognition developed by Coggins (2014); external security, domestic security and system stability and applying this to the situation of Honduras, the data shows low probability that they will act on the motive of external security to use recognition to weaken their competitors because of its own weak position. Being a weak country already but having strong established ties with the U.S, the government of Honduras maintains stability from this current situation. However, the data shows that Honduras also has a history of corruption (BBC News, 2018b; Meyer, 2020). Hence, there might be a risk of Honduras turning their back on both Taiwan and the U.S if offered more money from China. Nevertheless, they will have to consider whether a new ally (China in this case) would be positive or negative (Coggins, 2014). Extracting the data further, a motive of domestic security can be relevant because of the need for aid and economic cooperation. If the U.S has stopped or decreased its amount of aid and other financial packages, Honduras might look for other ways to strengthen its economic growth. However, this does not mean that the aid from China will help Honduras build up good governance or strong institutions to tackle its problems, rather the other way around, it can feed into the corruptness of the country (Meyer, 2020). Consequently, supporting Taiwan potentially sends a signal supporting secessionism even at home (Coggins, 2014). In the matter of system stability, the data shows that this motive

might not fully apply to Honduras. However, the fact that several other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have withdrawn recognition of Taiwan in the last years might affect the future decision of Honduras to do the same. The President Juan Orlando Hernandez of Honduras, expressed in an interview his regret about the U.S scaling back its investment in Honduras. Projects on combating street gangs have been ongoing but the financial support is now less from the U.S. Adding to that, Hernandez expressed that China's growing diplomatic presence is an opportunity (Graham, 2018). Drawing this back to the theory of the paper, developed by Coggins (2014) that countries withdraw their recognition from contested states when their national interests change or when they are pressured from Great Powers to do so, it is hard to predict what the future decisions of Honduras will be. What can be extracted from the data though, is that the decision is political depending on national (foremost economic) interest, and influenced by Great Powers such as the U.S and China. The implications of this will be further discussed in the section of summary of findings.

## 5 Summary of Findings

It becomes evident from the empirical analysis that national interests and Great Power influence steer a country's decision when it comes to the recognition of states. However, these interests can be several and very different depending on each case. This is something that needs to be further explored on a deeper level in future research as I have only scratched the surface with the chosen cases of the Dominican Republic and Honduras, due to the limited time and scope of this bachelor's thesis. Nevertheless, based on the findings of the cases of Honduras and the Dominican Republic I am able to answer the research question with a holistic picture of why some countries choose to withdraw recognition from contested states. The analyzed data shows that the decisions are driven by economic interests and influence from Great Powers. It has therefore not necessarily to do with their relationship to Taiwan. The evidence supports the theory and the hypothesis that countries will base their decision to recognize or not recognize dependently on economic interests. What still remains imprecise is how long it takes before a country decides to take such a decision.

The analysis is showing that the role of the U.S and China as two Great Powers are prepossessing the foreign relations of Taiwan by steering the political decisions in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially since China is increasing its relations in Latin America (Castillo, 2019). The empirical evidence is pointing to the fact that Latin American and Caribbean nations establish relations with China as a strategy to hedge towards the U.S power and influence (Hsiang, 2018). The power politics becomes visible when the U.S is suspending aid and recalling diplomats as a measure towards the recognition of Taiwan, and with the recently signed TAIPEI Act (Beech, 2018a, 2018b; Shattuck, 2020). It is also evident in the case of China because of its use of power and influence in the UN to block oppositions and countries that recognize Taiwan, in order to secure



its own goals or interests. Countries withdraw recognition from contested states because of foremost economic incentives and if offered better deals by Great Powers. Hence, Great Power recognition and support serves as guiding lines that other countries follow, which might lay the ground for future decisions regarding the recognition of Taiwan. Bottom line, it is evident that Great Powers, like the U.S and China are playing a big role in the recognition of Taiwan as an independent state, and foremost the decisions of its allies.

Based on the analysis, it is easier to analyze the case of the Dominican Republic, knowing that they have withdrawn already. Again, the analyzed data have presented itself to support the used theoretical framework and answer the research question of why countries withdraw recognition from contested states with the answer that each country's decision is ruled by self-interest and pressure from countries with more power. As discussed earlier, previous scholars have argued that countries tend to recognize those states that are more prestigious, e.g. how extensively recognized the other state is, e.g. the power of the state (Teorell, 2017). This is evident from the analysis when the Dominican Republic chose to recognize China instead of Taiwan which has triggered a domino effect in the case of Taiwan. President Medina of the Dominican Republic expressed that it was in their interest to switch to China because of their dynamic market (Castillo, 2019). However, when reading and analyzing the data regarding the withdrawal of the Dominican Republic, the data is giving the impression that the general opinion of the population of the Dominican Republic thinks the decision to switch is a mistake because of the long, already established relations with Taiwan (Diario, 2020).

Nevertheless, the decision is not completely about power relations, but also about dissatisfaction with current allies. When addressing the question of why the Dominican Republic has not withdrawn earlier, the data shows that President Trump's stricter immigration policies and regulations towards Latin America since 2016 have opened up a gap for China to foster relations with Latin

American countries (Soutar, 2019). The analysis presents, based on the three criteria developed by Coggins (2014), external security, domestic security and system stability that we can in both cases observe the intentions of these motives. However, these three criteria become slightly limited and would need more in-depth research on domestic politics. Based on this data it seems like the problem is located more in that the Dominican Republic has been unsatisfied with the U.S, rather than having issues with Taiwan. It appears as if Taiwan is just a small jack in a bigger game. Ergo, this shows again that the decision to recognize a state is about national interests and power politics. Hence, self-interest and power dynamics steer the decisions when leaders are given the possibility to select new peers. Additionally, previous research points to China actively trying to minimize Taiwan because Tsai Ing-wen is not accepting the one-China policy. Thus, for China it is not only about gaining power and new allies, but to ensure that Taiwan loses power through less recognition with the aim that they eventually will be crawling (back) to China (Coggins, 2014; Alexander, 2014).

It is hard to establish a clear conclusion of the case of Honduras from this analysis since Honduras is still an ally of Taiwan. However, we have observed that the relationship with Taiwan is good even though we can not tell if the relationship is good enough to remain, or if financial offers will make Honduras withdraw from recognition in the future. The pressure from, or the relation with the U.S is vital, but because of the restricted aid Honduras might look for other options in the future. Hence, the situation is contingent. Another aspect is that if Taiwan has less allies, they have more money to offer to the remaining ones. This might imply that Honduras will stay satisfied with the stable relation they currently have with Taiwan. However, I do believe that the politics of the U.S and Honduras need to be on good terms, or otherwise Honduras might switch recognition to China. After the U.S have suspended aid and financial packages to Honduras, an observation can be made of a slight shift in the Honduran politics towards China after President Hernandez expressed concerns with the U.S and opportunities with China (Graham, 2018). Hence, this can be where China has seen its possibility to

strengthen its relations with Latin American countries. Again, it is in this case evident that countries do not withdraw recognition of contested states (Taiwan) because of bad relations with that state, but rather because of change in national interests or pressure from Great Powers. Based on this evident, the hypothesis in this thesis is therefore correct.

Time will tell if recognizing China and establishing economic agreements is better or worse in the long run. Maybe there will be a new way of thinking when it comes to national interests in the future concerning democracy as a fundamental before establishing diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, with these two cases I can answer the research question with an overall picture that state recognition in practice is subjective and driven by self-interests. I do believe that the decision to switch recognition eventually will be the outcome for Honduras as well, if not the U.S will gain back influence in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## 6 Conclusion

In this research I have investigated the underlying factors that shape national interests in a country which have led to the decision to withdraw from recognition or remain as an ally of Taiwan. By observing the Dominican Republic and Honduras, the aim was to contribute to the literature with empirical evidence to the practice of recognition, and mainly the practice of the withdrawal of recognition. In doing so, this thesis has observed the aforementioned by answering the research question *Why do some countries withdraw recognition from contested states*. In summary, the empirical evidence has revealed that these decisions are ruled by economic interests and the influence of Great Powers. In concluding remarks, the withdrawal from Taiwan's recognition has necessarily not to do with the relations with Taiwan per se, but rather disaffection with one of the Great Powers (the U.S in this case) and foremost economic interests.

### 6.1 Suggestions for Future Research

Because of the complexity of this problem and the limitations of this thesis, suggestions for future studies can be made long. However, these are the main points that have come to mind while writing this thesis. I suggest a closer exploration of domestic politics and the individual countries' foreign policies. Meeting Montevideo criteria might be at its finest line for Taiwan with only fifteen remaining allies who are small in size and power. However, the criteria are still met. These maintained relations are both economical and cultural, and therefore Taiwan is essentially being treated as a state. Maybe, it is not of importance that Taiwan is losing allies because their unofficial relations are strong and comprehensive. Therefore, a completely different but interesting aspect to

take on for future studies can be the consideration of viewing the dilemma of state recognition in practice through as long as Taiwan (or any other contested state) can offer economic relations, countries have reason to maintain relations, even though diplomatic relations are not established. Hence, economic relations might be more important than diplomatic relations in the long run. However, formal diplomatic partners help Taiwan by giving legitimacy to the statement that Taiwan is an independent state. I would also suggest future research on power structures, as in what defines power in the world. Regardless that Taiwan is a small contested state and only recognized by fifteen countries, the economy is the 22nd biggest in the world, which should say a lot about economic incentives.

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