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The One China Problem?

The Diplomatic Recognition of the Republic of China

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Abstract

Why have some countries decided to recognize Taiwan despite majority of the countries maintain official ties with China? The thesis aims to investigate the reasons behind (non) recognition of Taiwan.

In order to answer to the research question, the research applies a comparative case study looking at the United States and Guatemala and their actions towards Taiwan and what could explain them.

Through the comparative case study of the US and Guatemala, this thesis has shown that, instead of solely one factor, the recognition of Taiwan is influenced by a complex set of factors that include economic interests, political ideology, and strategic considerations. The research demonstrates how Guatemala has maintained extraordinarily strong ties with Taiwan and why the US has a great interest to support Taiwan but refrains from officially recognizing it.

The findings illustrate that the US Taiwan policy reflects its geopolitical interests, in maintaining a strong economic relationship with China but simultaneously containing China's power.

Finally, this research provides evidence for the significance of the constructivist theory in understanding the dynamics of international relations and the role of small states in shaping global politics.

Key words: Taiwan, Diplomatic Recognition, Guatemala, Small State Foreign Policy, The United States

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List of Abbreviations

AIT	American Institute in Taiwan
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
IR	International Relations
LAC	Latin American and Caribbean countries
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
TAIPEI	Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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1 Introduction

Taiwan has been a contentious issue in international relations since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (hereafter the PRC or China) in 1949. Although, at the same time, most countries recognize the PRC and maintain official diplomatic relations with the PRC, a handful of states have chosen to diplomatically recognize the Republic of China (hereafter the ROC or Taiwan). This decision is not without costs, as it can lead to diplomatic pressure from China and economic sanctions. Nevertheless, some countries continue to recognize Taiwan despite these risks. This thesis seeks to answer the question of why some countries choose to recognize Taiwan despite the possible costs. Through a comparative case study of the US and Guatemala, this thesis will explore the factors that influence this decision and shed light on the dynamics of international relations in the 21st century.

It is essential to understand the political and economic development of the island in order to examine Taiwan's diplomatic recognition. The rivalry for international recognition between China and Taiwan dates back to 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) achieved victory in the civil war, which meant the withdrawal of the Kuomintang government to the Taiwan island. The Kuomintang government maintained its position as the sole legitimate government of all of China, and with the support of the United States, it preserved its representation in the UN until 1971, when the UN General Assembly voted to expel the ROC and replace it with the PRC (Lemus-Delgado et al., 2021). While Taiwan is denied a seat in the UN, it is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum. However, China has prevented Taiwan from being a member of any other international organizations and even an observer member of the World Health Organization (WHO).

China forces other countries with diplomatic relations with it to abide by the One China Policy. According to the policy, any country that recognizes the PRC must break official ties with the ROC and *vice versa*, as only one government can be recognized as sovereign (Long et al., 2021).

In recent years the solid economic growth of China and Taiwan has intensified the diplomatic rivalry, and China's goal has increasingly been to outbid Taiwan worldwide, even by military means. China's core interests include state sovereignty, national security, and national reunification. The interests are crucial to China because especially Taiwan's belonging to China is linked to the existence of the entire People's Republic. Challenging the regional unity of China could destabilize the whole political system, which is the focus of the party state's foreign security policy. Therefore, China has pressured the global community to reduce Taiwan's participation in various international forums, which range from international organizations, such as the UN and WHO, to boycotting Taiwan in

international sporting events. The critical element of China's strategy is to gradually decrease the number of states eager to recognize Taiwan diplomatically. China has been accused of buying loyalty from countries by granting loans and donations for infrastructure projects and employing vast amounts of money to convince Taiwan's remaining diplomatic allies to switch recognition (Lemus-Delgado et al., 2021).

As of February 2023, only thirteen countries diplomatically recognize Taiwan. Moreover, the remaining allies of Taiwan refrain from significant Chinese investment, credits, and loans due to the pressure of the One China policy. Therefore, the possible costs of recognition bring us to the research question of this thesis: *Why do some states recognize the Republic of China instead of the People's Republic of China despite the possible costs?*

If Taiwan were more broadly recognized, it would improve Taiwan's security, international participation, and predictability. However, the benefits of the states recognizing Taiwan are less clear. The potential benefits of recognizing a state should outweigh the high costs in order to make unilateral recognition attractive (Long et al., 2021).

Previous research on diplomatic recognition focuses on recognition by the great powers whose individual decisions are most impactful. However, greater attention to the decisions of small states would provide a more comprehensive picture of 'the recognition game' (Long et al., 2021). The research aims to address the motives behind diplomatic recognition and identify patterns affecting recognition. The patterns are likely to be complex and affected by various factors.

Studies of rising China and major powers' role in diplomatic recognition have increased exponentially. The number of states with formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan has diminished to thirteen. All of them are small states, and over half of them are located in Central America and the Caribbean, which positions the region as a significant battleground of cross-Taiwan Strait competition. Despite Taiwan's long-standing solid relationship with Latin America and particularly Central American countries, there has been minimal attention towards the relationship between Taiwan and Latin America in the field of international relations. Furthermore, in previous research, smaller states have not received as much attention in the case of Taiwan's diplomatic recognition, even though they are the main actors granting recognition or switching recognition from Taiwan. Therefore, the thesis attempts to fill in that gap by providing a comparative in-depth analysis of the US and Guatemala's policies towards Taiwan. The US represents a state that does not officially recognize Taiwan, whereas Guatemala represents a state that maintains strong diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The research utilizes case studies of recognition and non-recognition to determine how diplomatic recognition plays out in different arenas.

The thesis argues that for a small state, it is more beneficial to recognize another small state, such as Taiwan, whereas, for a large hegemonic state, the 'prize' for recognizing Taiwan is not enough to make it turn its back on China.

In order to evaluate what has led to the decisions of Guatemala and the US towards Taiwan, the research will perform a comparative case study and utilize the theoretical framework of constructivism and small state foreign policy to investigate recognition on bilateral levels.

The research begins with an introduction to the competition for recognition between Taiwan and China, following a review of previous literature on diplomatic recognition. After that, the research will introduce the theoretical framework of constructivism and small state foreign policy that add value to researching how social structures and identity influence small state foreign policies. After introducing the theoretical framework, the methods, case selection, and data are familiarized to a greater extent. This is followed by the analysis where the tools mentioned above are utilized to examine the data, which consists of government officials' speeches and statements. Finally, the research will discuss the findings more in-depth and summarize the main findings.

2 Literature Review

The literature review provides the background of the issue around Taiwan's diplomatic recognition and introduces previous literature and the concepts of diplomatic recognition and non-recognition in the field of social sciences.

2.1 The competition between China and Taiwan for international recognition

International relations (IR) scholars have recently paid growing attention to de facto states' (non) recognition and engagement in global politics. By de facto states, scholars refer to entities that obtain characteristics of internal sovereignty but lack broader international recognition. According to scholars, de facto states differ in nature but have at least two shared characteristics. First, the entity's leadership must be in control of the territory it claims, and second, it must have sought to gain international recognition as an independent state without success.

Taiwan's de facto dilemma stems from the One China Policy, a strict either/or approach to diplomatic recognition, and the increasingly aggressive campaign of China to isolate Taiwan from the international arena. The One China Policy considers Taiwan an inalienable part of mainland China; therefore, only one government can be recognized as sovereign. The growing international isolation of Taiwan has been shaped by four major events: exclusion from the United Nations (UN) in 1971, the loss of US recognition in 1979, the end of the Cold War, and the rapid rise of China (Long et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is worth noting that when Taiwan was excluded from the UN in 1971 and consequently lost in preeminent multilateral international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO). Competitive sovereignty, such as in the case of Taiwan and China, is rare, particularly due to the significant inequalities in size and power.

The critical elements of Taiwan's foreign policy since the presidential era of Lee Teng-hui in 1988 have been to gain international recognition of its national sovereignty. To achieve that objective, the government has taken actions to increase international agreements, broaden and enhance diplomatic representation, increase foreign visits by top government officials, and establish full diplomatic relations whenever possible. Nevertheless, Lee's foreign policy notions and practices regarding the diplomatic recognition of Taiwan have continued to influence Taiwan up to this date (Li, 2005).

Since 2016 the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) under Tsai Ing-wen has been in control of both the legislative and executive branches of Taiwan for the first time since the democratization of the ROC started in the early 1990s. The DPP has

been characterized as having a solid anti-China position and favoring the ultimate independence of Taiwan (Chen, 2019).

The international status of Taiwan determines the eagerness for diplomatic recognition. The Montevideo Convention defines four criteria of statehood: first, a permanent population; second, a defined territory; third, a government; and fourth, the capability to form relations with other states and claim the political existence of the state to be independent for international recognition. Taiwan fulfills the first three criteria and has therefore sought to gain diplomatic recognition to enhance its claim as a sovereign state (Hu, 2015).

The diplomatic battle between China and Taiwan has been featured dominantly by Latin America. Despite the end of Taiwan's diplomatic relations with the United States, Taiwan has had diplomatic relations with several Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries. The rivalry between China and the United States frames the growing dispute between China and Taiwan. Furthermore, the United States plays a significant role in the geopolitical influence in Latin America. Traditionally, the Latin American countries have been allies of the Taiwanese government. The region has strategic importance to Taiwan as Latin American countries have sustained diplomatic recognition in exchange for development aid. However, the situation has changed over the last few years, and Latin America is no longer a homogenous region supporting Taiwan. Uruguay was the first state in Latin America to switch recognition from Taiwan to China in 1988 due to the aggressive rivalry between China and the US (Lemus-Delgado et al., 2021). Whereas the latest Latin American state to cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan was Honduras in March 2023 (The Guardian, 2023). Other Latin American countries that have switched recognition from Taiwan to China include Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Panama (Long et al., 2021, p. 3).

Previous research on de facto states focuses on domestic conditions and the effects of international non-recognition of the de facto state. Furthermore, the studies on (non) recognition of de facto states have focused on the recognition decisions of major powers whose individual decisions are more impactful. However, as the case of Taiwan illustrates, de facto states also spend resources and energy to seek and maintain the recognition of non-great powers. Therefore, greater attention to the decisions of small states would provide a more comprehensive picture of the 'recognition game.' Furthermore, in the case of Taiwan, small states with typically little political influence are the major players, suggesting different rationales behind recognition (T. Rich, 2009, p. 161).

Long and Urdinez (2021) provide three alternative explanations for small state recognition. The first explanation is that major powers create a 'tipping point' of recognition that creates pressure or socialization for small states to follow the major powers. Second, at times, ideological or ethnic ties of a 'kin-state' may motivate the recognition of de facto states through diasporas. Finally, the most common explanation for recognition is direct material benefits. The broad literature on Taiwan's 'checkbook diplomacy' highlights the explanation of material benefits (Newnham, 2000; T. Rich, 2009). However, the explanatory relevance of simple checkbook diplomacy is losing relevance, as China is now increasingly able and willing to outbid Taiwan. China's essential tool to assert its influence over Latin

America is its economic might. The massive economic presence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) enables China to gain a better position in Latin American countries through its financial instruments, such as loans and state-owned and -run banks (Luca Gardini, 2021). Therefore, given China's economic and international influence, the puzzling question of why some states continue to recognize Taiwan and have not switched to the PRC yet remains largely unaddressed in existing scholarship. Suppose China can simply 'buy' recognition by providing infrastructure developments and opening state markets. In that case, an additional factor to economic reasons must prevent the holdout countries from switching their commitment to China, which would be the rational decision on an economic basis.

2.2 Diplomatic recognition and non-recognition

The research applies the concept of diplomatic recognition in the theoretical framework. Diplomatic recognition is crucial to the very definition of state sovereignty, meaning that other states partially determine the sovereignty of other states. Recognition of another state is a unilateral act where the recognizing state formally acknowledges that the other entity has the characteristics of sovereign statehood (Teorell, 2022, pp. 15–16). Furthermore, the foundations of the modern international system have emerged from the Peace of Westphalia; whereafter sovereign states have become the main actors in international relations. Under international law, sovereign states are equal and guaranteed equal participation in the international arena. Today, sovereignty is the fundamental norm on which the international society is based on (Lemus-Delgado et al., 2021, p. 49).

Recognition is crucial in international relations as it represents the process through which actors come to exist as actors in the international system and take a particular identity within that system. The more states diplomatically recognize a country, the greater the sense of external legitimacy the country has (Teorell, 2022, p. 2). Moreover, article 2 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 provides that international recognition of entities as sovereign states enables them the power to establish diplomatic relations through mutual consent. Therefore, theoretically, recognition can be considered a prerequisite for establishing diplomatic relations (Abidde, 2022, p. 5).

Furthermore, recognition is crucial to Taiwan's national security, to prevent further isolation and, more importantly, to deny the ability of the PRC to swallow Taiwan without international objection, which makes forced unification more difficult. At its best, on a global scale, Taiwan can prevent an even more significant shift towards Beijing. Moreover, diplomatic recognition assists in maintaining an international presence in formal institutions such as the WHO (T. Rich, 2009, p. 181).

Previous literature on diplomatic recognition has discussed alternative explanations based on strategic and self-interested behavior. Kinne (2014) focuses on strategic adaption, notably prestige and signaling in the state system. According to Kinne (2014), states should prefer to recognize other states that are more

prestigious, and a simple way to determine how prestigious a state is in the international system is to assess how widely recognized the state is. Furthermore, Kinne (2014) argues that signaling and prestige are a consequence of strategic responses to the costs and informational asymmetries imposed by the global diplomatic network. States face resource constraints and have to be selective in choosing diplomatic partners.

Coggins (2014) demonstrates how great powers seem to coordinate diplomatic recognition; hence, countries are more likely to grant recognition to entities that are recognized by great powers. This could apply to all recognizing parties in the system, not just great powers themselves. Furthermore, recognition works as a signal in the state system. When a country extends recognition to a newly formed state, it works as a signal to other states and partners that it is a preferred cause of action. Therefore, it may be argued that the more states that recognize a state, the more likely it is that other partner states will also extend recognition to the state. Furthermore, one reason to recognize a country could be to advance economic ties with that country.

In political theory, recognition, and misrecognition, recognition's negative counterpart, are rooted in Hegel's recognition theory. According to Hegel, seeking recognition from peers motivates human behavior. He argues that mutual recognition is crucial to establish self-consciousness. Therefore, the existence of the 'self' relies on and is defined by the realization of the 'other.' Predominantly, Hegel focused on interpersonal relationships; however, his framework can be applied in interstate relations in which recognition completes statehood, and it is fundamental to determine the international legal personality of an entity. Therefore, foreign states' recognition determines the entity's existence and is a prerequisite for sovereignty (Hsieh, 2020, p. 207).

According to the Hegelian view, identity is constructed through mutual recognition; therefore, the IR concept of recognition relies heavily on the constructivist ontology. Hegel's concept of recognition provides the basis for the notion of recognition in political theory. According to Hegel's concept, the constitutive theory believes that recognition completes statehood and is necessary to determine the legal personality of a state. Therefore, foreign states' recognition determines statehood's existence (Hsieh, 2020).

The research will utilize the concept of recognition and non-recognition that enables the analysis of the relationship between recognition and non-recognition in Taiwan's relations with other states.

In the case of Taiwan, the framework of diplomatic recognition helps to emphasize the diverse factors that shape actors' behavior toward Taiwan's recognition, including economic, political, historical, and ideological factors. The framework also highlights the role of international norms and conventions that shape state behavior and the development of international politics. Furthermore, the concept of diplomatic recognition may provide a suitable approach to research the evolving and complex dynamics of state recognition in the international system.

Regarding diplomatic recognition, the strategies of both China and Taiwan have clearly shifted over time. Taiwan has shifted from opposing dual recognition to supporting it since the 1990s. However, China has maintained its position in

opposing dual recognition, which significantly prevents Taiwan from benefitting from the change. Taiwan's strategies to attract countries have also shifted from ideological grounds to appeals based on similarities in democratic development or being a small state in the international system governed by major powers (T. S. Rich et al., 2022).

Previous literature identifies three main factors in the state's diplomatic shifts between the ROC and the PRC. Firstly, the material benefits, where the shift in recognition results from a rational bidding calculation of both parties across the Taiwan Strait. The bids typically include humanitarian aid programs and various trade agreements. Secondly, the intensity and density of state interactions are emphasized behind recognition decisions. Scholars highlight that diplomatic relations are not established automatically but are shaped intentionally through asymmetric economic and political cooperation. Thirdly, some scholars have argued that the choice of diplomatic recognition is a form of alliance overshadowed by a specific international structure (Xiang et al., 2023). While the external factors may be relevant, the state-level factors are also essential for a more comprehensive understanding of Guatemala's diplomatic strategies toward Taiwan. Thus, the research aims to generate a framework that combines external and internal factors to comprehensively understand the diplomatic choices of Guatemala and the US toward Taiwan.

Furthermore, Portada et al. (2020) argue that the competing economic and political interests of Taiwan, China, the US, and the Central American countries themselves influence the patterns of switching diplomatic recognition. Transitions in administrations influence different policy objectives and ideologies to the highest political offices in the US, Taiwan, and countries across Central America, which can affect the diplomatic alliances of Taiwan. For example, during the period of 'détente' between China and Taiwan, when Kuomintang's leader Ma Ying-jeou was the president of Taiwan from 2008 to 2016, no instances switched recognition from Taiwan to China.

During the years of détente, President Barack Obama's administration did not have to develop a policy to prevent countries from switching recognition. However, after the Democratic Progressive Party's leader Tsai Ing-wen was elected to be the president of Taiwan in 2016, the issue of Taiwan's diplomatic recognition was placed back on the table for President Donald Trump's administration. In fact, the Trump administration has shifted towards a greater emphasis on imposing political and economic penalties in case of diplomatic switches from the ROC in order to punish and deter future switching (Portada et al., 2020), which will be discussed in a greater extent in chapter 6.

3 Theoretical Framework

This section introduces the theoretical framework applied in the thesis, including a discussion of how constructivism can be utilized and further how the theoretical approach of small state foreign policy from the constructivist standpoint assists in conducting the research.

3.1 Constructivism

The research departs from a constructivist theoretical approach. Constructivism is based on the rejection of a neutral approach: the world and its phenomena are understood as social constructs, where norms and institutions are viewed through the interaction between actors. Therefore, according to the constructivist view, it is possible to argue that the relationship between Taiwan and the countries recognizing it is a social construct. Constructivism emphasizes the role of norms, ideas, and identity in shaping state behavior (Wendt, 1992). In the case of Taiwan's diplomatic recognition, the One China policy has been the critical factor working as a normative framework that has shaped international response and state behavior towards the recognition. Due to the One China policy, most states diplomatically recognize the PRC as the sole legitimate representative of China. However, some states have challenged the norm and chosen to recognize the ROC and maintain formal relations with it instead of the PRC (T. S. Rich et al., 2022).

Constructivism has been growing gradually as an international relations theory. It has not been a part of international relations theories since the 'beginning of time' but has been considered a relatively new theory. Constructivism is seen as having emerged in the 1980s and has developed into a thematically rich and empirically diverse field of contributions (Michel, 2016, p. 87). Constructivism has its roots in critical theory, as it seeks to problematize what is taken for granted and question what is assumed to exist "out there" (Pouliot, 2004, p. 323). Therefore, due to its essential characteristics, it differentiates between the natural and the social world and views the world as a social construction that is constructed through social interaction (Guzzini, 2000, p. 160). Drawing on sociology, constructivists argue that international relations are constructed by people talking, following rules and norms, being guided by worldviews and institutions, performing rituals, and engaging with various social practices.

For this reason, constructivists focus on social phenomena such as norms, rules, institutions, language, or its production. These phenomena create agency and structures, and constructivists argue that these produce each other through interaction. Constructivists describe the world not as what it is but as a process,

replacing positionality with a changing ontology (Locher et al., 2001, p. 114). Constructivism challenges the traditional view and reality of the immutability of international politics as they question the normal and argue that the world is constructed in a social dimension. Therefore, constructivists challenge the positivist nature of the social world and knowledge.

At the heart of constructivism would be the following argument that a state's identity shapes its preferences, interests, and behavior. However, constructivists have opposing views of the weighted influence of international versus domestic attributes on constructing state identities (Jung, 2019). Wendt's (1992) systemic constructivism particularly emphasizes international factors, whereas Katzenstein (1996) focuses more on domestic factors shaping state identities. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape the US and Guatemala decision making process, the research will utilize a combination of the two views to identify both domestic and international factors.

The constitution of international agents is at the center of attention for constructivists. Moving from traditional IR theories, sovereign states are no longer considered as given and preexisting entities; instead, state identities, national interests, social movements, and transnational networks are emphasized in need of explanation. Furthermore, as constructivists focus on the construction of identities and interests, they provide an adequate framework to explain shifts in strategies (Locher et al., 2001, p. 114).

Wendt provides three elements that constitute social structures: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices. Shared knowledge, understanding, or assumptions shape how actors act in certain situations and construct their relationships and interactions with other actors. According to constructivists, material resources provide meaning to the human agency through the structure of shared knowledge. Therefore, for example, nuclear weapons or other material resources alone do not explain anything; instead, they need shared understanding to acquire particular importance. Nevertheless, the most crucial factor for social structures is practice since social structures can only exist in the process. The process of interaction constructs the social structures, which in turn shape the identity and interests of the actors and the understanding of the material context (Wendt, 1995, pp. 72–72).

As Wendt (1992) argues, actors may have different identities, which are the social definition of the actor. The identity of an actor is grounded in the idea of what actors collectively think about themselves and one another, which further constitutes the structure of the social world. The identities of actors then shape the interests. The research will apply Wendt's (1992) constructivist view to examine how actors' beliefs and identities have shaped their behavior in Taiwan's recognition game.

Furthermore, conventional constructivists focus on what causes an actor to act and discover the relationship between social norms, shared beliefs, ideas, routine patterns of social interaction, actors, interests, and identities (Devetak et al., 2017). Finally, conventional approaches focus on *why* particular decisions that lead to specific actions were made (Doty, 1993, p. 298). The research applies conventional

constructivism to tackle why some states diplomatically recognize Taiwan despite the fact that it would be more rational to recognize China.

The traditional dominant theoretical strands, namely neorealism, and neoliberalism, have some shortcomings in theorizing world politics, as they are, for example, insufficient in answering questions concerning non-state actors. In contrast, constructivism emphasizes the importance of actors other than states, while states remain meaningful. In contrast to the restrictive view of dominant theories of states as the exclusive and unitary actors, constructivists consider, for example, social movements, international organizations, and specific government agencies as actors that may, in certain conditions, transform international relations. Ideas and norms are the primary factors shaping world politics and how different actors deal with each other (Devetak et al., 2017).

Therefore, as the research aims to determine why some states recognize Taiwan, the constructivist approach is helpful in investigating how cultural factors, historical legacies, and international norms shape the recognition game of Taiwan and the different actors' attitudes towards recognizing Taiwan. Furthermore, the constructivist theory may provide an understanding of domestic and international factors shaping Taiwan's battle to gain diplomatic recognition.

By utilizing the constructivist approach, the thesis will analyze the data through the following guiding questions: What kind of identity do the political leaders of the US and Guatemala suggest? What historical elements can be perceived in the identity? How does the state's role in the international system influence identity formation? Finally, what kind of in and outgroups could be identified based on the data?

3.2 A theoretical approach to small state foreign policy

There are many ways to conceptualize smallness. Previous studies on small states lack a sufficient definition of small states which. Because earlier research has not achieved a consensus on a specific definition of a small state, the basis of scientific research has been limited (Galal, 2020, p. 41).

According to Galal (2020, p. 44), three characteristics can be applied to define small states. First, small states can be defined based on national capabilities and how they are used to implement foreign politics compared to the national capabilities of other countries they interact with. Second, small states can be defined considering the relationship between attaining power and its organization in the international system, which provides a solid basis for defining small states according to measurable indicators. Third, in the definition of small states, the element of perception plays a key role. The state's self-perception of its own capabilities as well as how other states perceive such capabilities are essential in defining small states. For example, a small state can play an influential role when

it perceives that a small state threatens a large state and when it is prepared to bear the consequences of the costs and sacrifices that its policies entail for large states.

Small states form an essential part of the international order. About two-thirds of the UN member states consist of small states (Thorhallsson et al., 2017). Similarly, to other states, they operate in the same economic and political environment. They pursue the same objectives in their foreign policy, including prosperity, security, and well-being of their citizens. Moreover, they have the same diplomatic toolbox then larger states that they utilize to conduct their diplomacy. While small states share the full definition of autonomy and sovereignty with major powers, certain characteristics influence the actions of small states in the international system. The politics and diplomatic practices are restrained by limited capabilities and capacity. Furthermore, their limited military and economic capabilities place the small states in a weak negotiation position (Baldacchino et al., 2020).

A traditional stereotype that major powers have of small states is that they are helpless pawns in world politics. The military strength of large states is in the essence of their distinctive power. Undoubtedly, larger states enjoy more prosperous economies, larger militaries, and more significant resources. However, the ability to secure what the state wants by using violence is only one attribute of political power. There are also other means that a state can utilize to be effective in exercising influence under certain conditions. Both small and major powers can employ ideological, economic, and diplomatic methods in addition to military measures to influence and resist coercion. Regardless of the size of the state, they may win friends and influence people with psychological tactics, buy consent with goods and services, and gain strength through useful alliances (Ingebritsen et al., 2006).

The most fundamental desire of small states is to gain recognition and status from the outside world. Whether large or small, all states seek for recognition. However, small states are more dependent on large states' attention and goodwill than large states that obtain attention and recognition already due to their material power. Therefore, within the rules and norms of international organizations and the international system, small states seek diplomatic endorsement from larger states (Long, 2017, pp. 8–9).

However, due to the constraints that small states experience in their economic, material, and diplomatic resources, they have to compensate by prioritizing their efforts to ensure any influence at all. Therefore, small states typically tend to emphasize policy sectors of great significance from which they could benefit directly (Thorhallsson et al., 2017). In addition, small states have inbuilt structural weaknesses and, in comparison to large states, vastly different needs due to their size. Therefore, small states are likely to operate according to different logics than large states. Furthermore, small states may utilize close ties with large states to acquire diplomatic backing and the sharing of resources.

Long (2017) discovered the relationship between small states and great powers and gaining influence. All states, large or small, can either turn to other states or try to utilize their internal resources. However, as by definition, small states typically lack from traditional forms of power; they must 'specialize' in how to exploit their

relationships and resources. Small states are more dependent on external options, such as having a special relationship with either a great power or other small states. For small states, diplomacy is the tool of statecraft that is employed as an objective to thrive. Indeed, small states tend to play a significant role in multilateral diplomacy. Moreover, diplomacy is often tied with other means of gaining support; for example, small states may influence the world's opinion by operating from a 'morally righteous' base (Long, 2017). According to Long (2017, p. 20), small states can gain power according to three distinct categories: first, through derivative power, which is based on the relationship with a great power, second, collective power, which is based on coalition building of supportive states, usually through institutions, third, particular-intrinsic power, which rests on the resources of the small state.

The research on small states in IR has not been a continuous flow. Instead, there have been three somewhat separate streams of literature. The first strand involves issues of self-determination, the second tradition deals with foreign policy options of alliance or neutrality, and the third one consists of comparative literature on politics and policy formation in small states. The international norms, ideas, and identity in the focus of constructivism paved the way to rethink small state studies. If, in addition to international institutions and relative power, also ideational factors matter, small states may obtain new possibilities to maneuver in their foreign policy. For example, small states may play the role of norm entrepreneurs influencing international politics, conducting discursive and framing politics, and socially constructing more beneficial identities in their relationships with other entities (Ingebritsen et al., 2006). Furthermore, acting as norm entrepreneurs in regional and international forums may provide unique opportunities for small states to persuade other states to adopt their norms (Thorhallsson, 2019).

The third phase of small state studies began in the 1990s after the revival of the Cold War and in the age of globalization and regional integration. In the third phase, the classical IR theory debate has been challenged by social constructivist and post-positivist approaches emphasizing norms, ideas, and (national) identities. As Ingebritsen et al. (2006) argue, small state studies hold considerable potential for future IR research. The continued existence and even prospering of small states in spite of the presumably unfavorable odds constitute a puzzling challenge to the study of social sciences.

Furthermore, small states have often been studied in terms of outcomes of great-power bargains or as already-established arenas where great powers manage international affairs. Previous literature on small states has focused primarily on the variables of size in terms of area, population, and resources, which have been criticized for focusing on quantity only (Galal, 2020, pp. 41–42). Long (2017) argues that focusing on resource-based and compulsory power alone can limit IR scholars' ability to assess small states' actions. Thus, instead of studying small states through the lens of capabilities and material factors, the IR scholarship might benefit from studying the issue in terms of relations between states and international institutions (Ingebritsen p. 21). In fact, large states and small states are mutually constitutive, and there could be no large states and major powers if there were no small states.

Previous small state research illustrates the necessity of focusing on the systemic role that leaders see their countries playing instead of focusing on perceptions of capabilities. Increasing attention on (self-) perceptions of the state's systemic role, instead of perceptions of the need for external aid, could reveal how small states shape their distinctive attitudes towards the international society. With the criteria of small states described above, Guatemala can be categorized as a small state and the US as a large state. Therefore, based on the theoretical framework, the research aims to unpack how Guatemala, as a small state, and the US, as a large state, perceive their own systemic role in the international community and what has shaped their self-identity to explain the relationship of the two states towards Taiwan. The thesis will apply a theoretical framework intertwining constructivism and the phenomenon of small states' foreign policies.

As discussed above, identity and ideas are central concepts of constructivism, and thus, it is the closest theory to the analysis, treatment, and interpretation of the behavior of foreign policies of small states, particularly countries in the developing world. In reality, ideas, identity, and values have a significant impact on decision-makers in small states and present a main incentive for their behavior in international politics. Thus, identity and the role of identity play a significant role in small states' foreign and security policies. However, as scholars argue, identity is not formed before foreign and security policies but is defined through the practice of the policies. Thus, identity and foreign and security policies present a mutually related and interactive phenomenon instead of being perceived as deterministic or separate (Lingevičius, 2019).

IR scholars agree on some common characteristics in small state foreign policies; however, in practice, there are differences in foreign policies of small states as the states typically have different goals and tools (Galal, 2020). Previous literature on small states illustrates how different cases vary, and they combine characteristics from different theoretical perspectives and introduce unique descriptions. This grounds the premise that smallness is not a homogenous or integral narrative but instead a multidimensional phenomenon dependent on its importance and role in multilayered identity dimensions (Lingevičius, 2019). Therefore, relying only on mainstream IR theories may lead to shortcomings in the analysis of Guatemala's foreign policy towards Taiwan.

Nevertheless, despite the existing contradicting views in small state research, it is still essential to analyze small states. The state's identity and political agenda are set based on being a small state. Therefore, evaluating conditions under which the discourse of small states is changed or affected by the internal or external political process is essential in research.

The analysis of small states cannot be separated from the specific characteristics of a country and the broader context, such as historical experiences and dominant historical narratives, geopolitical position, the security environment, and strategic culture. These factors also support the argument that smallness should be considered as a part of the state's identity. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the circumstances in which discourse is constructed and the country's attitudes toward the international system (Lingevičius, 2019).

Therefore, to include the broader context and external and internal factors that might affect the decisions made by Guatemala and the US, the research will utilize a three-level analysis presented by Hu (2015), where factors and actors at the systemic, domestic, and individual levels are used to explain international phenomena, which could be applied into small state foreign policy decisions. The systemic level of analysis includes the role of the international system and the position of the particular states in the world and their interactions. The domestic level of analysis focuses on the important factors within those states. In the case of Taiwan's recognition, the domestic factors include the role of economy, ideology, and geography. The individual level of analysis considers the importance of major decision-makers within the country. Creating categories of behavior is helpful in understanding the dynamics of asymmetrical relationships, particularly from the perspective of the small state. Therefore, to develop a comprehensive analysis of Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan and, in comparison, why the US does not recognize Taiwan, the research will apply the three-level analysis.

Xiang et al. (2023) argue that external threats and state capacity could explain small state foreign policy decisions in the case of recognizing Taiwan. If we take the example of Guatemala as a small state, if the external threats from the US were low, it could bandwagon with the US and act smartly by supporting Taiwan in exchange for foreign aid. However, if the external threats from the US increased, Guatemala could seek to enhance its international status by establishing relations with China. When the state capacity is rising, and the risk of external threats started to decrease, Guatemala would no longer seek to enhance its status, but instead, it could shift between Taiwan and China to get the highest bid.

The larger states have less to win or lose in bilateral relationships; however, the smaller states are more exposed to opportunities and risks and have minimum control over relationships. Separately from the will of the country, systemic limitations restrict small states from implementing the size-based identity dimension. The challenge that small states face is not due to the size itself but the international system that does not allow small states to act. Therefore, the imbalance exists due to the institutionalized system in addition to quantitative differences.

4 Case Selection, Methods, and Data

The following chapter provides an overview of the methods applied in the thesis. First, it introduces qualitative content analysis and explains its application in the research. Following this, it presents the data used to generate the analysis. Finally, it addresses possible limitations and validity concerns of the research.

The research strategy consists of a qualitative comparative case study of Guatemala - Taiwan relations and US - Taiwan relations that consider the explanations suggested by the literature on constructivism and (non) recognition of de facto states. To perform the comparative case study, the research will conduct a content analysis based on the texts of Guatemalan and the US government officials. The content analysis is complemented by media coverage, additional documents, and secondary sources to identify the motives behind (non) recognition by Guatemala and the US.

4.1 Qualitative content analysis

In order to explain why some states recognize Taiwan and how ideology and the international system influence the decisions, this study employs qualitative content analysis.

Flick (2014, p. 170) characterizes content analysis into three main features: qualitative content analysis is systematic, reduces data, and is flexible. Qualitative content analysis helps to reduce the amount of material, thus, allowing the researcher to focus particularly on the selected aspects of meaning, especially those aspects that are relevant to the overall research question. The coding frame contains categories of higher abstraction levels instead of focusing on the specifics of particular messages. According to Halperin et al. (2017, p. 336), content analysis is “a more interpretive form of analysis concerned with uncovering meanings, motives, and purposes in textual content.” The research will apply the constructivist approach and small state foreign policy framework to systemize, analyze and compare different meanings found in the text. Therefore, applying qualitative content analysis in combination with the theoretical framework of constructivism and small states’ foreign policy aims to infer the reasons behind (non) recognition of Taiwan.

Due to the systematic character of content analysis, every single part of the material that is relevant to answer the research question must be examined. Therefore, the method prevents the risk of looking at the material only through certain expectations and assumptions (Flick, 2014, p. 171). Statements, speeches, announcements, and comments by Guatemalan and the US political leaders

constitute the empirical material of the research. The systematic nature of content analysis allows for generating comprehensive information on the interests that are in play from both sides, the US and Guatemala. Furthermore, the textual data reduces the risk of bias within the information (Halperin et al., 2017, p. 345).

To evaluate and analyze the data, the research will use NVivo. NVivo is utilized to increase the reliability of the study (Weber, 1990). Furthermore, NVivo is helpful in sorting, classifying, and arranging rich text-based data and discovering complex relationships across the texts (Paulus et al., 2017). In order to code the ideas that make up national identities and inform national interests and practices, the research will use NVivo to create themes and categories to identify patterns and visualize the data about the diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. Based on the research question and the aim of the research, it utilizes top-level codes such as economic, geopolitical, ideological, security, and strategic interests.

The research will combine inductive and deductive concept-driven approaches in developing the themes and codes. The coding process will use the deductive approach at first to create some preliminary codes based on the theoretical framework and previous knowledge on the topic. Afterward, the research will apply an inductive data-driven approach to modify the codes based on the data (Elo et al., 2008). The data-driven open coding in NVivo will be conducted by consistent systemic comparison, meaning that during the coding, the categories will continuously be compared to the paragraphs that have already been coded, and thus, already existing codes will be applied. If no suitable code exists, a new category will be created. A list of categories will be fully developed after the coding is finalized, which is then subject to further categorizations (Halperin et al., 2017).

4.2 Case selection and material

Linguistic and non-linguistic practices reveal how the world is perceived and understood; thus, a content analysis focusing on speeches and statements is the most suitable research method to analyze the decisions of states (Lingevičius, 2019). In the case of Taiwan's diplomatic recognition, discourse is understood as written and spoken texts, i.e., speech acts.

The speech acts utilized to conduct the analysis include statements related to foreign policies, which construct the foreign policy discourse that Guatemala and the US engage with towards Taiwan. In order to identify relevant texts, the preliminary step was to screen through the most popular news outlets and governments' and political leaders' official websites. Texts were selected according to these criteria: relevant announcements, speeches, interviews, or other statements issued by Guatemala's and the US political leaders, discussions on international events, processes, or foreign policy related to Taiwan. The texts selected included various announcements, statements, speeches, and comments made by Guatemalan and the US political officials. Furthermore, the texts are complemented by media coverage, additional documents, and secondary sources in order to sufficiently identify the motives behind (non) recognition by Guatemala and the US.

The text selection for the content analysis includes ten statements, speeches, announcements, and interviews from different Guatemalan government officials and 11 from the US government officials. The texts are gathered within the time frame of 2017 to 2023.

Even though the Taiwan Strait issue has prevailed since 1949, the time frame of 2017 onwards was chosen since it can be perceived that the tensions have escalated after Tsai Ing-wen was elected as the president of Taiwan in 2016. President Tsai and the DPP have stood for Taiwan's greater separation from China and Taiwan's legal independence instead of recognizing the One China policy (Schubert et al., 2022, p. 77). Thus, the question of diplomatic recognition has increased as a consequence of Tsai's more ambitious strive for independence.

For the case studies, Guatemala was chosen because of its relative size, being the largest country to recognize Taiwan, its regional influence, and because of its seeming disinterest in abandoning Taiwan. Furthermore, Guatemala is a crucial partner in countering the growing influence of China. Guatemala represents the population frame of a recognizing small state. Whereas the US represents an intriguing case of a non-recognizing country, yet having a strong *de facto* relationship with Taiwan, representing a population frame of a non-recognizing big state.

The comparative nature of the research enables to development of an in-depth analysis of reality, while focusing on one case only could lead to weak results. Furthermore, as Zartman (2005) argues, it is useful to include both negative and positive cases in a comparative analysis to provide a sufficient explanation of outcomes. Therefore, to be able to fully explore, explain, and understand the data and increase generalizability, the research will include a comparative analysis of Guatemala as a state that recognizes Taiwan, and the US, as a state that does not recognize Taiwan. Furthermore, the comparative case study allows analysis within the small state and large state framework to illustrate similarities and differences in Taiwan policies between two different models.

4.3 Limitations and validity concerns

Central problems in content analysis that have to be taken into account are concerns of consistency, reliability, and validity. For example, in content analysis, words and texts are classified into fewer categories, and there might be ambiguity in the classification process, which might raise concerns about reliability. However, when the classification is done with a computer, it typically leads to perfect reliability. Thus, the research will utilize NVivo to ensure the reliability of the study. To increase the reliability of the thesis, it is important to consider the stability, reproducibility, and accuracy of the study (Weber, 1990).

Furthermore, a concern might be the validity of the variables based on the classification. Issues with validity may occur out of the ambiguity of word meanings and definitions of categories or variables. In a discussion about validity, it is important to consider correspondence and generalizability (Weber, 1990).

A challenge that may occur in content analysis is in the interpretation as the translation of the meaning in text into an analytical or theoretical language which might weaken the reliability and validity of the research. According to Weber (1990), the primary concern in content analysis translations is mapping the texts into more abstract, theoretical structures. The research uses the constructivist theory as a specialized language to interpret the texts and explain the substantive results. Thus, the mapping means transforming the many words of the texts into more broad and fewer categories that are in relation to the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. Translations from text to theory might cause issues of validity in the research, which need to be addressed by describing the analysis process and the results sufficiently so there is a clear understanding of how the analysis process is carried out. In order to increase the reliability of the research, it is crucial to demonstrate the link between the results and the data (Elo et al., 2008).

Furthermore, to ensure high reliability in the research process, it is crucial to think about the recorded units, so what is the basic unit of text that is classified. The recording unit can be word sense, sentences, themes, paragraphs, or the whole text. Weber (1990) points out that it may be harder to reach high reliability when coding larger units such as paragraphs, even though it reduces the effort needed.

5 Analysis

Both of the cases will follow the structure of first introducing systemic levels, then domestic levels, and finally, the individual levels. The analysis will demonstrate the central factors that explain the US and Guatemala's policy towards Taiwan, including the role of the international system, economic, geographic, and ideological factors, as well as the role of major decision makers' influence in shaping the national interests and decisions.

5.1 Case: The US non-recognition of Taiwan

5.1.1 Background of the US-Taiwan relationship

Despite Washington having no formal ties with Taipei since 1979, it has remained as Taiwan's most important international backer and arms supplier.

Under President Jimmy Carter, the US recognized the PRC as China's sole representative government in 1979 and terminated official relations with Taiwan. Since then, the political and military relationship between the US and Taiwan has been defined by the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). Politically the TRA ensures unofficial *de facto* "commercial, cultural, and other relations between the people of the United States and the people of Taiwan" (Kuehn, 2021, p. 2) despite not officially recognizing Taiwan as a *de jure* sovereign state. Moreover, according to the Act, US presidents cannot unilaterally alter US-Taiwan relations without the approval of the Congress. Militarily, the Act provides that "the United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain sufficient self-defense capabilities" (Kuehn, 2021, p. 2)

Under Ronald Reagan's presidency, the TRA was affirmed by "Six Assurances" in 1982, which included policies such as the United States would not change the terms of the TRA, the US would not officially recognize the Taiwanese sovereignty over China, and the Taiwan issue is to be decided peacefully among the Chinese themselves (Kuehn, 2021).

However, in recent years there has been a notable change in the tone of the US Administrations' rhetoric when addressing the US policy towards Taiwan. The concept of strategic ambiguity, which the US has complied with, according to the TRA since 1979, has appeared to be under change. Up to this date, the US has

committed to supporting Taiwan to defend itself by selling weaponry to Taiwan, but not by using its own military to defend Taiwan, while not ruling that position strictly out either.

Furthermore, the US congressional members have persistently tried to improve support for Taiwan. However, the US presidents have taken caution in the relationship with Taiwan and respected the One-China Policy and the TRA so that the support for Taiwan would not damage the Sino-American relationship or fuel Chinese nationalism. In addition, the US Congress has been prone to address the authoritarian nature of the PRC and calls for a tougher stance to pressure China for the improvement of human rights and better socioeconomic policies. The executive branch, on the other hand, has pursued a liberal engagement policy towards China, emphasizing open and liberal values (Chen, 2019, p. 251).

A crucial issue in the US grand strategy is to prevent China from gaining any power, particularly in the Latin American region that the US considers as its 'backyard.' The national strategy during the Trump Administration is particularly relevant in the case of Taiwan. The 2017 National Security Strategy of the Trump Administration describes China as a revisionist power that challenges the United States values, influence, and wealth. China utilizes its economic aggression and military modernization to redefine the order in the Indo-Pacific region and coerce neighboring countries; thus, the US views China as a 'strategic competitor.' The security strategy of the US is shifting from decade-long anti-terrorism to a rivalry of power with China, which will be discussed in more detail later (Luca Gardini, 2021, pp. 188–189).

The US arms strategists, military industries, and defense officials have enhanced their relationship with their Taiwanese counterparts in the annual US-Taiwan Defense Conference Forum. Furthermore, the US has demonstrated its commitment to Taiwan's security by increasing the publicity and frequency of warship transits through the international waters of the Taiwan Strait (Chen, 2019). Furthermore, Trump signed the National Defense Authorization Act of 2018 and 2019, which urges the US government to enhance military relations with Taiwan, such as deepening personnel exchanges, exercises, and training, in addition to allowing regular port calls between the US and the ROC navies. In addition to military support, the US enhances its cooperation with Taiwan through the American Institute of Taiwan (AIT), which represents the US de facto embassy in Taipei (Chen, 2019, p. 253).

Taiwan plays a significant role as a US ally in the Indo-Pacific, and therefore, it can expect greater support from the US in its Latin America strategy. In recent years the US has signaled a more supportive and friendly stance towards Taiwan, particularly the Trump Administration that adopted a series of new foreign policy means, including legislative acts strengthening the official contacts between the US and Taiwan. The victory of Donald Trump represented an unexpected steadfast support for the Tsai government, and in consequence, the relationship between China and the US moved beyond bilateral concerns to larger issues of geo-economics, geopolitics, and geostrategic competition. However, the Chinese government has condemned the US support and its acts towards Taiwan as a breach

of the One China policy and as a direct interference with the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs (Chen, 2019).

Trump's administration indicated a long-term dispute with the Chinese government on the commercial tariff war and the issue of Taiwan being a part of a greater strategy aiming to gain hegemony on the international stage. In the context of asymmetric relations, the US has traditionally supervised Central American countries, and therefore, the US has condemned the Central American decisions to switch recognition from Taiwan to China, as the decisions were not considered to be in line with the regional interests and the influence of Washington (Lemus-Delgado et al., 2021).

Yet, it is necessary to recognize that the collection of Taiwan-friendly initiations and legislation is primarily symbolic and non-binding. As the current Director of the AIT, Sandra Oudkirk (2022, November 29) points out in her opening statement at a press conference that the cooperation and support to Taiwan are "all consistent with the United States' One China policy." Therefore, it could be argued that many supportive and goodwill initiatives towards Taiwan often include restraints and qualifications to justify their compatibility with the One-China.

However, the US has maintained its practice of strategic ambiguity and continued to reassure the PRC that it has not condoned *de jure* independence of Taiwan. The interests that the US might have in play is that altering the cross-strait *status quo* could undermine the framework enabling stability, peace, and development.

5.1.2 The US-China rivalry

This section will unpack the systemic level factors that influence the US-Taiwan relationship and decisions made by the US. The systemic level analysis includes the role of the international system and the relative position of the US in the world. On systemic levels, the ongoing power competition between the US and China has played a significant role in the US strategies towards Taiwan. The widespread notions of the Chinese threat and the need to restrain China's rapidly expanding comprehensive national power, which could ultimately challenge the US global hegemony in the long run, are in the focus of the US ongoing support to Taiwan. Furthermore, as Taiwan possesses high technological potential and significant financial resources, it would pose an even greater threat to the US if China gained power over the island. Maintaining the *status quo* over the Taiwan Strait may serve as a strategic interest of the US to prevent China from strengthening its power. However, if the US would establish an even closer relationship with Taiwan, Sino-American relations would deteriorate even further (Leksyutina, 2017, pp. 5–6).

As the speeches propose, the United States views China as a threat to regional and international order, and as Biden mentioned in his statement on March 2023, the US "acknowledges the serious long-term challenge to the international order posed by the People's Republic of China, including disruptive actions such as economic coercion, non-market policies and practices, and human rights abuses" (Biden, 2023, March 24).

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy Report confirms the negative approach that the US has towards China. The Acting Secretary of Defense, Patrick Shanahan, confirms the negative approach in his transmittal letter that makes a clear statement: “Inter-state strategic competition, defined by geopolitical rivalry between free and repressive world order visions, is the primary concern for US national security. In particular, the People’s Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations” (The Department of Defense, 2019). Despite the fact that the US regards China as a threat, the announcements, speeches, interviews, and other statements given by the US political leaders emphasize that there is no change in the longstanding American One-China policy, and the basic position towards Taiwan remains unchanged. As Richard Bush (2019, June 5) emphasizes, “As with previous administrations, the Pentagon under Trump has *mostly* conducted enhanced security cooperation with Taiwan quietly. It assumes that Beijing knows these activities are happening but avoids creating public diplomatic disputes”.

Furthermore, the texts demonstrate that the US views peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait important for the regional stability and for the entire international order, as the factor was repeatedly emphasized in the statements. As President Biden (2023, March 24) mentioned in his statement: “We emphasize that our basic positions on Taiwan remain unchanged and reiterate the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity in the international community. We encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.” This factor points out that the US political leaders consider the peaceful resolution of the issue a critical factor.

The rhetoric of the statements displays the firm stance of strategic ambiguity that the US practices towards Taiwan. The statements highlight the US’s strong commitment to the One China policy and TRA. However, as President Biden stated, the US is willing to get militarily involved to defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion. Biden (2022, May 23) stated in a joint press conference with Japan’s Prime Minister: “We agree with the One China policy; we’ve signed on to it and all the attendant agreements made from there. But the idea that — that it can be taken by force — just taken by force — is just not a — is just not appropriate”. Furthermore, in the press conference, when Biden was asked whether the US would take military actions in Taiwan, if necessary, his answer was clear and unambiguous “yes.” The shift in the rhetoric suggests a changing interpretation of the One China policy.

The US policy of strategic ambiguity has been successful for decades, as it sends a clear warning not to attempt fundamental changes to the *status quo* for both sides. However, the changing environment between China, Taiwan, and the United States may require some adjustments to some elements of the US policy. The adjustments that the US could take in its policy towards Taiwan include strengthening and repeatedly retreating its commitment to deterrence and avoid measures that lead to or even appear to lead to granting formal recognition of Taiwan. Furthermore, the US should avoid overreacting to actions that China takes in equivalent retribution exchanges between Taipei and Beijing. The most important, albeit conditional,

message of deterrence that the US sends with respect to the Sino-Taiwanese is its repeated statements opposing any kind of forcible alteration of the *status quo*. To prevent war over the Taiwan strait, it would be wise of Washington to avoid any actions that suggest a development toward officially recognizing Taiwan (Heginbotham et al., 2019).

5.1.3 Economic, geographical, and ideological factors in the US

Taiwan needs the US for security, economic, and diplomatic reasons more than the United States needs Taiwan. Such assessments fail to mention the positive roles Taiwan can play that align with US agendas on regional and global issues. Seeing U.S.-Taiwan relations as a one-sided relationship also limits the potential of this relationship because Taiwan will always be seen as weak, dependent, unpredictable, a liability, or a potential problem.

In regard to economic factors, Taiwan is a vital economic partner to the United States as a prosperous, robust, orderly, and free society with solid institutions serving as the model for the region. Taiwan was the ^{eighth} largest trading partner of the US, totaling to \$91.8 billion in goods trade in 2022 (Statista Search Department, 2023).

Taiwan dominates the production of semiconductors, generating more than 60% of the revenue of the world's semiconductor manufacturers, which makes it the largest manufacturer of the chips. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company supplies companies all over the world, including tech companies in the US, such as Apple, and produces approximately 90% of the world's semiconductors. The semiconductors are crucial to the global economy since they keep everything from smartphones to cars and weapons running (Fernandes, 2023, p. 4). As Senator Roger Wicker (2023, February 9) expressed in his speech, "If Beijing gains control of Taiwan's semiconductor industry, it could rewrite the rules of the global economy. Beijing wants to dictate the terms of any negotiations with the United States, costing Americans tens of millions of jobs and stalling our economic growth." Therefore, as the whole world is dependent on Taiwan's semiconductor industry, it could potentially contribute to the motivation of the US to protect Taiwan to safeguard its own interests.

Sandra Oudkirk (2022, November 29) describes in her statement that economic, and people-to-people ties between the US and Taiwan are "the bedrock of our relationship." According to the speeches analyzed, it is possible to argue that the economic relationship with Taiwan is particularly important for the US. Maintaining the economic partnership with Taiwan is in the US's primary interest. In fact, the economic relationship may be perceived to be in a key role regarding the rivalry with China; as Wicker (2023, February 9) emphasizes, "America's web of alliances and partnerships is critical to our success in competing with China in the long run. With 60 percent of the world's population, the Indo-Pacific is projected to be the largest contributor to global economic growth over the next 30 years. If we lose these critical partners, we would also cede a critical advantage in

our effort to compete economically with China, a nation with five times our population and an economy nearly our size.”

From the geographical perspective, due to Taiwan’s geopolitical location, it has great strategic importance to both the US and China. The island of Taiwan is a crucial link to the ‘first island chain,’ which includes pro-US countries such as the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan. The island chain forms a vital stronghold for the US, supporting safeguarding trade routes and containing China’s expanding influence. The Taiwan Strait is an arterial route for cargo ships from Asian factories to the US and Europe (Läng, 2022). As Blinken emphasizes, “Almost half the global container fleet and nearly 90 percent of the world’s largest ships passed through the straits this year. That’s just one reason why these actions by Beijing are so disruptive”. Therefore, any actions, primarily military actions, affecting the transport route could cause severe disruptions to the global supply chain.

In terms of ideological factors, the data highlights that the role of ideology plays a significant role in US-Taiwan policy. As Biden (2022, November 14) emphasizes in his statements on: “We’ll defend American interests and values, promote universal human rights, and stand up for the international order, and work in lockstep with our allies and partners.” The US views Taiwan as a fellow democratic country that shares many democratic values with the US.

According to the speeches and statements, it is possible to highlight ideological factors such as human rights, democratic norms, and the rule-based international order that influence the US position towards Taiwan. Taiwan is a fully functioning democracy, respecting the rule of law and international human rights, which are norms that the US wants to promote, and thus probably a factor behind the US’s robust unofficial ties with Taiwan. As the AIT director, Sandra Oudkirk (2022, November 29), stated in a press conference: “We’ll continue to work to expand our cooperation with Taiwan on our many shared interests and values, to support Taiwan’s meaningful participation in the international community, and deepen our economic ties, all consistent with the United States’ One China policy.”

The US political leaders strongly express their concern about the current instability over the Taiwan Strait. In addition to the security of Taiwan, the instability raises questions in the regional and global security as President Biden emphasizes that “peace and stability of Taiwan Straits, is an indispensable element for peace and prosperity of the international community.” As the consequences of an intervention in Taiwan would be so wide-ranging, it is the top priority of the US to maintain peace and stability in Taiwan. Furthermore, the regional stability is also crucial to the US from the economic and geographic point of view, as discussed previously. These factors could explain the US’s strong military support to ensure Taiwan’s self-defense needs; however, the actions are taken “in line with the Taiwan Relations Act,” as Sandra Oudkirk emphasizes. Therefore, it could be argued that the US views itself in an important role in the region and in the whole global security. As Blinken (2022, August 5) states at a press availability, “That is what the region expects of us: to be a steady and responsible leader.”

Furthermore, US officials repetitively highlight the historical factor of the Taiwan-US relationship. The US emphasizes that it will follow the One China policy that was signed a long time ago. Furthermore, Sandra Oudkirk (2022,

November 29) affirms: “So, you can see, the US and Taiwan have a longstanding partnership that is only getting stronger as we jointly address new and emerging challenges.”

The change of administrations brings different ideologies and policy objectives which are described in the next section focusing on the individual’s role.

5.1.4 US Taiwan policy under Trump and Biden administrations

Up to this date, the TRA remains as the legal framework underpinning the relationship between Taiwan and the US. While the political guidelines and the basic legal framework set in the TRA have not changed since the 1979, the Taiwan policy practiced by the US has seen some significant changes in recent years.

Despite the US’s relatively strict approach towards the One China policy, the policies towards Taiwan have varied over time within different administrations, which highlights the importance of individual decision makers. During Obama’s administration, he introduced a ‘Pivot to Asia,’ which primarily aimed to enhance engagement and cooperation with China in economic, political, and military sectors. Obama’s pivot did not feature Taiwan prominently. However, during Trump’s administration and his China policy, Taiwan came to play a more visible role (Kuehn, 2021). Trump exchanged Obama’s engagement with China for a more direct, competitive, and confrontational approach, which was illustrated, for example, in his National Security Strategy that defined China as the primary ‘strategic competitor’ for the first time (White House, 2017). Hereby, Trump’s administration upgraded the US-Taiwan relationship symbolically, militarily, and politically.

The attitudes towards Taiwan have shifted in the US when Donald Trump was elected as the president in 2017. His administration exercised an increasingly confrontational stance toward the PRC and significantly tilted toward the ROC. The practices of Trump’s administration suggested a growing unification in the approaches of the executive and legislative branches to strengthen ties with the ROC and push back against the assertive China. Nevertheless, despite the increasing support of the US and the Taiwan-friendly rhetoric and initiatives, the US has continued to reassure China that it does not recognize the ROC as a formal diplomatic state and does not support Taiwan’s independence, and maintains only an unofficial relationship with it. Thus, the US government indicates to China that it has not changed the US Taiwan Strait policy in ways that the PRC should be worried about (Chen, 2019).

Trump took a number of actions that symbolically signaled the upgrading of the US-Taiwan ties. For instance, president-elect Trump conducted a brief phone call with the Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on December 2, 2016 (Grothusen, 2021), which carried significant meaning due to the unofficial relations US-Taiwan relations under the TRA.

As mentioned above, the Trump administration had an exceptional stance towards Taiwan compared to previous administrations. During his administration, top executive branch officials from the National Security Council and State

Department consistently acclaimed Taiwan for its contributions to regional peace and stability in addition to its positive role in democratic governance.

President Trump signed the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019 in March 2020. According to the TAIPEI Act, the US government must take action to strengthen the diplomatic relations of Taiwan with other partners in the Indo-Pacific, support the international presence of Taiwan, promote Taiwan's membership in international organizations where statehood is not a requirement, and grant Taiwan the observer status in other international organizations. Furthermore, the TAIPEI Act enables the US to utilize humanitarian assistance to countries in Latin America and the South Pacific as a leverage to prevent them from cutting ties with Taiwan (Luca Gardini, 2021).

As Richard C. Bush (2019, June 5) points out in his speech at the Taipei Forum in Taiwan: "He (President Trump) has affected his own administration's Taiwan policy in a unique and vacillating way." The US-Taiwan relations experienced a substantial upgrade during Trump's presidency, both symbolically and also in the terms of concrete policies, due to Trump's confrontational China policy. Therefore, many Taiwanese were concerned that the relationship between the US and Taiwan would deteriorate when President Trump departed from the White House and Joe Biden was elected. In contrast to Trump, President Biden was at first regarded as being 'soft on China.' However, Biden has continued the support to Taiwan and demonstrated its self-declared 'rock solid' support for Taiwan.

Various aspects of Biden's China policy have characterized a continuity of Trump's approach. However, in contrast to Trump, the individual measures of Biden towards China and Taiwan have included a broader and more coordinated strategy to strengthen the position of the US in East Asia. President Biden's strategy includes the (re)building and strengthening regional alliances with partners alienated by Trump's fickle bilateralism, long-term strengthening of the US competitiveness, more significant focus on human rights and democratic values to increase the US economic independence from China, and attempting to find areas where US-China cooperation is necessary and possible. The symbolic, political, and military aspects of the US policy towards Taiwan have remained crucial within Biden's strategy. Already on Biden's first day in office, he made a great symbolic move toward Taiwan by inviting Taiwan's de facto ambassador, Hsiao Bi-khim, to the presidential inauguration ceremony. However, the most important symbolic action taken by Biden and his team has been the stating its strong commitment to respect the political and military obligations under the TRA that the US has towards Taiwan (Kuehn, 2021, pp. 5-6).

For example, Biden was asked in the CBS 60 minutes interview whether the US forces would defend Taiwan's island, and he assured that US military forces would defend Taiwan "if in fact there was an unprecedented attack". Simultaneously Biden's administration has made sure to emphasize that the general principles towards the US-Taiwan relationship have not changed. For instance, in the interview that Biden delivered to CBS, he declared that "We (the US) are not moving-- we're not encouraging their (Taiwan) being independent. We're not-- that-- that's their decision" (Biden, 2022, September 18)

Politically, the Taiwan policy practiced by Biden has included bilateral negotiations focusing on restoring the US as a trustworthy partner to Taiwan, in addition to multilateral attempts to internationalize the Taiwan issue and make Taiwan's voice heard within the limitations of the formal *status quo*. Bilateral meetings have increased, and as Nancy Pelosi stated during her visit to Taiwan, it can be expected that the visits increase even further. "And let's just say that, in terms of our visit here (Taiwan) and would that lead to other visits – I certainly hope so. But I think it's important to note that Members of Congress, several of them had made trips just earlier this year. Five Senators, bipartisan, came – again, including the Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Menendez, came. Not too much of a fuss was made. Individual Senators have made trips or plan to make trips" (Pelosi, 2022, August 3).

In terms of internationalizing the Taiwan issue, Taiwan's security and regional peace and stability have been prominently in the focus of attention at bilateral and multilateral levels.

Furthermore, Biden's administration has frequently encouraged its partners to increase Taiwan's participation and access to international organizations, including organizations under the UN, such as the WHO. Sandra Oudkirk (2022, November 29) points out that "foundationally, we (the US) believe that Taiwan's meaningful participation in the UN system and other international organizations is a pragmatic issue."

However, as Biden reaffirms, "But the United States is committed. We've made a commitment. We support the One China policy. We support all — all that we've done in the past, but that does not mean — it does not mean that China has the ability — has the — excuse me, the jurisdiction to go in and use force to take over Taiwan. So, we stand firmly with Japan and with other nations that — not to let that happen. And my expectation is it will not happen; it will not be attempted" (Biden, 2022, May 23).

In addition to the symbolic and political elements, the Taiwan policy under Biden has also included a strong military element signaling the US commitment to enhance Taiwan's ability to support itself. As Senator John Hoeven (2023, April 13) mentioned in his statement when he met with Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan: "it's not only about providing that military hardware that you have purchased and that needs to be delivered – we're working on that – but also I'm here to listen to you and to your ministers to find out what else can we do to work together to again strengthen your defense and to work with you on that defense."

Thus, the military engagement includes increased US military activity, especially naval operations around Taiwan's international waters, and direct cooperation with Taiwan's armed forces. The US has a strong repetitive rhetoric that the US will continue to support peace and stability in Taiwan and cross-strait issues.

One example of the strong military engagement is the bilateral memorandum of understanding signed between the US and Taiwan in March 2021 in order to increase formal close cooperation between their coastguards. Furthermore, according to US officials, the US plans to station between 100 and 200 troops in Taiwan in the coming months, up to around 30 there in Spring 2022. And in May

2023, The Diplomat reported about the US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) simulating operations in Taiwan for the first time, which took place on April 27, 2023 (The Diplomat, 2023). When considering the recent discourse surrounding the US position in the Taiwan Strait, the military exercises simulating fighting on Taiwan's land and particularly focusing on special operations are significant. The measures taken by the US constitute powerful signals to reassure the Taiwanese public and China of the US' rock solid' support towards Taiwan.

5.2 Case: Guatemalan recognition of Taiwan

5.2.1 Background of the Guatemala-Taiwan relationship

Since Taiwan was removed from the UN in 1971, the ROC has had a mixed record in maintaining formal diplomatic recognition. However, the Central American countries have traditionally had a robust diplomatic relationship with Taiwan. Moreover, Guatemala was the first country in Central America to establish diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1933. The economic growth of Taiwan fueled aid and trade, and the ROC's strategy with its Central American allies can be characterized as 'dollar diplomacy' well into the twenty-first century. Various scholars argued that Taiwan could buy or rent diplomatic allies indefinitely, particularly from small or developing countries. In addition to channeling cash into anonymous bank accounts to purchase support from various political leaders, Taiwan actively identified and developed ties with high-potential military officers and bureaucrats for long-term support from Central American countries. For example, the Guatemalan president Alfonso Portillo received bribes worth of \$2.5 million from Taiwan between 1999 and 2002 in exchange for diplomatic recognition, which he admitted to the United States Federal Court in 2014. Despite the bribery scandal, Taiwan has been viewed as a trusted ally, particularly due to its active involvement in community-based disaster prevention initiatives and disaster relief efforts. Taiwan has also been represented as a 'listening donor' that is respectful of the needs of the community (Portada et al., 2020).

Even though other Central American states, such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama, recognize the ROC over the PRC, and they have distanced themselves from Taiwan to some extent, Guatemala confirms that it will remain as Taiwan's ally. The rhetoric of Guatemala has reaffirmed the strong support towards Taiwan. Indeed, Guatemala has been a diplomatic ally of Taiwan for over nine decades and has maintained relations already before the founding of the PRC. Furthermore, Guatemala and Taiwan have strengthened bilateral ties through frequent high-level official exchange visits (Portada et al., 2020, p. 554).

Currently, Taiwan's policy towards Central and Latin America includes three main strategic objectives: first, to strengthen diplomatic relationships with Central American countries; second, to gain support from the Central American countries

for Taiwan's membership in the United Nations; and third, securing reliable sources of raw materials through increased investment and trade while diversifying markets for Taiwan products (Li, 2005).

Taiwan's diplomatic activities in Guatemala can be divided into five areas; development assistance focused on technology and agriculture, improvement of the country's infrastructure, medical diplomacy, interaction with domestic media, and education in the form of scholarship provision and cultural exchange (Alexander, 2014).

The diplomatic cooperation and reaffirmed mutual support were enhanced with a recent bilateral agreement signed between Guatemala and Taiwan on September 1, 2022, which suggests that Guatemala stands by Taiwan instead of following the lead of other Central American countries and switching to China.

5.2.2 Guatemala's role in the international system

When looking at the systemic role of Guatemala in the international context, it would be rational to argue that as a small state, it would be more beneficial for a state such as Guatemala to recognize the PRC over the ROC, at least for economic reasons. Costa Rica is a good example of this argument as the first Central American country that abandoned Taiwan and switched to diplomatic recognition of China in 2007. The President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, defended the decision as an act of fundamental realism and realizing the global context that it is forced to deal with (Portada et al., 2020, p. 560). However, the PRC continues to increase pressure on states that recognize Taiwan by offering economic and other benefits that may attract small states like Guatemala to consider switching recognition.

Therefore, Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan is greatly determined by the power rivalry between the US and China, and therefore the decision is not that simple. In the climate of the confrontational relationship between the US and China, any encroachments into the American 'backyard' by China have a greater significance.

The case of Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan highlights the great power rivalry between China and the US. Guatemala is involved in the dynamic rivalry between China and the United States, which affects Guatemala's decision to a great extent since Guatemala, as a small state, can, for example, take advantage of the competition between great powers who are ready to offer them economic support in the face of rivalry from another great power.

From the US side, the support of Taiwan in Latin America has a lot to do with the US national interest and the restraint of China. If the US fails to support Taiwan, Latin American countries will most likely develop closer ties with China. For the US, preventing China from increasing its foothold in the region is a crucial part of its strategy in its rivalry with China (Luca Gardini, 2021, p. 188). Accordingly, particularly the Trump administration's national strategy is of relevance.

Until the Trump administration, the US did not take direct measures to specifically prevent or punish diplomatic switching. However, under the TAIPEI Act that the Trump administration signed, the US has signaled a shift towards

economic and political punishments to restrain future switching in the recognition of Taiwan.

Portada et al. (2020) provide a rough overview of the aid data for Central America, which illustrates that despite the fact that China has gained inroads into Central America with its aid packages, the PRC aid to Central America is still microscopic compared to the value of the US aid. Therefore, for Central American countries, the economic costs regarding aid and market access could be significant if the US were to sanction the countries for switching recognition to the PRC.

In Central America, the US foreign aid outweighs the level of foreign aid that China offers; the threat of cancellation of the foreign aid from the US presents a significant leverage in the diplomatic contest.

As the first country from Central America to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, Costa Rica serves as a good example of a record of the lessons of diplomatic switching. The decision of Costa Rica was based on a strong belief that diplomatically allying with China would help improve the economy of Costa Rica and attract more foreign investment. However, after 16 years of economic partnership with China, Costa Rica has illustrated a mixed record of economic outcomes, and the consequences were not as beneficial as anticipated (Portada et al., 2020). Thus, the mixed post-switching economic records that Central American countries have experienced have redefined the evaluation of diplomatic switching for the remaining diplomatic allies of Taiwan. The position of Guatemala in between of the great power rivalry is likely to influence its decision on Taiwan's recognition.

5.2.3 Economic, geographical, and ideological factors in Guatemala

At the domestic level, genuinely local factors and national interests were fundamental in Guatemala's case.

As the theoretical framework of small states in the international community proposes, Guatemala's practice of operating from a morally righteous base and in accordance with international law and norms may be a form of status seeking. Through this practice, Guatemala gains international-level benefits. Guatemala's diplomatic relationship with Taiwan offers the small state the chance to be heard in international relations and benefit from gaining attention, economic benefits such as donations and foreign aid, and travel delegations.

In terms of economic and material benefits, the speeches underpin that Guatemala might also have economic interests at play in recognizing Taiwan. Ambassador Oscar Adolf Padilla Lam mentions in his statement in Taiwan that "Taiwan is a core pillar of Guatemala's social and economic development" (Padilla, 2022, December 19). Furthermore, in various speeches delivered by President Giammattei, he shows his gratitude towards the Taiwanese economic investments in Guatemala, as the largest of them the recent construction of the Chimaltenango National Hospital. In the donation and handover ceremony of the National Hospital of Chimaltenango, President Giammattei noted that the hospital will increase the capacity of Guatemala's national health system and benefit Guatemalan residents.

Furthermore, Taiwan has been providing Guatemala with a lot of financial support in multiple areas, as Giammattei emphasizes in his speech: “The cooperation between Guatemala and the republic of Taiwan is broad and diverse. It includes projects in infrastructure, agriculture, education, health and medicine, information and communication technologies, small and medium enterprises, security, transportation, culture, and institutional strengthening”. (Giammattei, 25.04.2023)

Furthermore, Morales points out Taiwan’s support in repairing and reconstructing a large part of Guatemala’s transportation infrastructure in addition to other assistance that Taiwan has provided. “Taiwan and Guatemala both share values like democracy, freedom, and equality, and have outstanding achievements through bilateral cooperation in medicine, health care, infrastructure, technical assistance, agriculture, education, technology, and tourism” (Morales, 2019, April 30).

The speeches demonstrate the eagerness to further expand economic ties and cooperation with Taiwan in order to gain domestic economic benefits. For example, Morales stated “that Guatemala is a coffee-producing country with great potential. So, for Taiwan enterprises, Guatemala is a good choice for investments, and he also hopes to attract more foreign capital to Guatemala” (Morales, 2019, April 30). Furthermore, he expressed hope that the Taiwan-Guatemala free trade agreement will have a broad effect, further enhancing bilateral commercial exchanges and cooperation.

Furthermore, Guatemala has later strengthened its economic ties with Taiwan by establishing a new commercial council on January 20, 2022, to deepen economic growth and trade ties between the two countries. Minister Pedro Brolo Vila stated that “with the opening of a Commercial Counseling at the Embassy of Guatemala in Taiwan, we reiterate and emphasize our commitment to strengthen bilateral relations between Guatemala and Taiwan in the areas of trade and investment” (Gobierno de Guatemala, 2022).

Despite the fact that Taiwan lacks general international recognition, it may offer rewards to countries that will recognize it and support Taiwan’s causes. Furthermore, Guatemala may express its autonomy and independence in foreign policy by recognizing Taiwan and, as a consequence, achieve economic and political benefits.

There are two major geographical factors that can be identified to contribute to the diplomatic recognition of Taiwan: the significant distance from China and Taiwan and the small country’s size. It is apparent that distance decreases power. Central American allies are far away from China, which minimizes Chinese power over them. China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has been able to bully Taiwan’s allies with its right to veto resolutions. In fact, Beijing vetoed the UN resolution of sending a military mission to Guatemala for the first time in 24 years but later compromised on the issue (The Spokesman-Review, 1997). Furthermore, Beijing was able to delay the application of Nauru and Tuvalu when the states applied to the UN due to the countries recognizing Taiwan (Henderson et al., 2003, p. 102). However, because of the distance, China does not pose a direct military or security threat to the Central American countries. Hence, the distance

factor minimizes the possibility of China to exercise power over Taiwan's diplomatic allies in Central America.

Another geographical factor that might affect the recognition is the small size of Guatemala. Despite Guatemala being one of the largest allies of Taiwan, it is a small state by population and area. Furthermore, Guatemala is considered to be prone to natural disasters. Like many other developing countries, Guatemala has to balance its relations with major powers and regional actors, such as the US, China, and other Central American countries. Due to the smallness of Guatemala, it is more dependent on foreign aid and support. Therefore, in return for diplomatic recognition, Taiwan can provide Guatemala with crucial support. As Jimmy Morales, the former president of Guatemala, expressed during a state banquet in Taiwan in 2019, "Taiwan has provided critical and extensive aid for Guatemala after the volcanic eruption in June 2018 that caused immense damage to the country" (Morales, 2019, April 30).

Because most of Taiwan's allies are small in size, there is a low threshold to exchange economic benefits for diplomatic recognition (Hu, 2015). Furthermore, compared to China, Taiwan offers small states the possibility to be viewed as 'important.' In fact, Guatemala might gain more attention by recognizing Taiwan, which is recognized by fewer states, than recognizing China and being among one of the many states recognizing the PRC. Giammattei declared that "Guatemala is a political and diplomatic ally of China and Taiwan because the island has shown solidarity with Guatemalans in difficult times and permanently collaborates, in technical and financial aspects, with national development" (Giammattei, 2021, October 8).

In terms of ideological factors, the impact of the Cold War is often viewed as providing the foundation of why Central American countries have remained allied with Taiwan. One example that could confirm this argument is that Taiwan delivered weapons to Guatemala after a US congressional ban in 1977 (Dahmer et al., 2018). However, the context of the Cold War does not explain why much of the region remained allied with Taiwan after the ideological context did not exist anymore.

Still, historical factors cannot be overlooked since Guatemala is one of the few countries that has supported Taiwan already before its expulsion from the UN in 1971. Since then, Guatemala has maintained a relatively strong and stable relationship with Taiwan (The Heritage Foundation, 2022). This is evident in President Giammattei's (2023, April 25) latest speech in Taiwan as he emphasizes that "old friendship that go back a long way in history, is the strongest factor maintaining the robust ties between the two states." Thus, Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan could be seen as a continuation of its longstanding foreign policy practice and strategic interests.

The additional ideological factors featured in the statements included a firm belief in the principles of peace, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The speeches highlight particularly the importance of democratic ideology that enhances the Guatemala ties with Taiwan.

The statements reveal how Guatemala's identity is constructed on the characteristics of being the largest and strongest country and economy among

Central American countries. Moreover, in the international context, it could be perceived that Guatemalan identity is determined by characteristics such as being a morally righteous actor in the international community and basing its decisions on international law and principles.

As the theoretical framework proposes, a small state like Guatemala may gain a position as a norm entrepreneur in international politics by recognizing Taiwan. This fact can be recognized from the speeches delivered by Guatemalan political leaders as they demonstrate Guatemala's strong commitment to international law and support the principle of self-determination and the rule of law. Furthermore, Guatemalan officials emphasize the principles of peace, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, which signals Guatemala's strong alignment with international norms. Giammattei (2023, March 23) stressed the importance of international law and principles in its bilateral relationship with Taiwan in his speech held in March 2023: "The friendship between Guatemala and China (Taiwan) is unbreakable, it is the clear example of those who tiredly defend the fundamental principles of international law, promote the solution of disputes through dialogue and negotiation and who jointly seek to achieve the most great wish for our people: freedom, prosperity and development and full sovereignty."

International norms are brought up in Mario Bucaro's statement that he gave during his visit to Taiwan in August 2022; he mentioned that "Guatemala will always support Taiwan, because we both firmly believe in the principles of peace, sovereignty, and territorial integrity," (Bucaro, 2022, August 30) which highlights that Guatemala and Taiwan are like-minded democratic nations. This rhetoric is recurrent in the speeches, as also Giammattei (2023, April 25) stated in his latest speech in Taiwan that "I come from the other side of the pacific ocean, from far away, to reaffirm these principles of our foreign policy. This is a strong demonstration of solidarity, commitment to defending sovereignty and territorial integrity, and firm rejection of foreign aggression". He continues that "we must defend peace. We must defend sovereignty. We must defend the right of nations to independence". Giammattei underlines that Guatemala remains firm in its decision while other nations choose self-interests over friendship (Giammattei, 2023, April 25).

Furthermore, in the same speech, Giammattei mentions that the relationship Guatemala has with Taiwan is based "not only in diplomatic ties or official contacts but because we have built trust and friendship between the nations through cooperation and exchange." Morales reaffirms that the strong diplomatic ties are based on "cordiality, fraternity and cooperation" (Morales, 2017, January 12). These factors could indicate that ideology and national identity as a small state allows Guatemala to sympathize with Taiwan.

In the statements, it is noticeable that Guatemala wants to send the world a strong message of its support for Taiwan. For example, Padilla (2022, December 19) emphasized that Guatemala is "showing and proving to the world Guatemala's support for Taiwan," and Giammattei (2021, October 8) underlined that it would continue to defend the inclusion of Taiwan in the UN and other international organizations and "the world wins with the recognition of the island as an independent country ."The strong rhetoric of "showing" the world that Guatemala

respects international norms and the rule of law and will remain as Taiwan's ally and support its international participation could signal Guatemala's status seeking in the international community.

Due to international norms and rules that Guatemala strongly emphasizes in its statements, Guatemala also reinforces its stance to support Taiwan's participation in international forums and organizations, which are based on principles of universality and inclusiveness.

As discussed above, Guatemala has aligned with the US on various international issues. Whereas Taiwan is a democratic country with a market-based economy, and it shares various interests and values with the Western Countries, including the US. Therefore, Guatemala's diplomatic alignment with Taiwan could be viewed as a reflection of its economic and political alignment with the United States in addition to other Western democratic countries.

These factors highlight that the ideological factors play a significant role in explaining Guatemala's alliance with Taiwan.

5.2.4 The role of major decision makers

In addition to the systemic and domestic factors influencing Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan, it is possible to identify individual factors. Major national leaders often have a significant role in shaping a country's foreign policy. Therefore, it is essential to discuss the roles of individual leaders when studying Taiwan's diplomatic recognition. Individual leaders have the opportunity to exercise influence over domestic and international factors, such as the country's intentions, strategy, and power, as well as other domestic and international policies of the country. Previous studies of Taiwan's diplomatic allies often point out the importance of leaders' roles.

Although most of the countries recognizing Taiwan are democracies, they have strong traditions and cultures of authoritarianism that are not favorable for public participation. Furthermore, the corruption in Central America drives the instinct of Guatemala to seek aid rewards from other countries (Hu, 2015). Large-scale infrastructure projects and financial gifts in the form of Taiwanese aid packages create a powerful incentive for political elites, who may have short time horizons in power, with which they hope to utilize and benefit from such packages. An individual leader's decision of the diplomatic recognition of Taiwan may or may not work in their country's best interests, but it often serves the leader's personal interests.

The importance of leaders in foreign policy and their self-serving interests can be illustrated by the case of the bribery scandal in Guatemala that started in early 2005. Guatemala's former President, Alfonso Portillo, was accused of receiving US\$2.5 million as a personal cheque from Taiwan to buy Guatemala's continued diplomatic recognition (Alexander, 2014; Hu, 2015). Alfonso Portillo was later charged in the US court with taking bribes from Taiwan and money laundering the funds through US banks (The Guardian, 2014). The bribery scandal

has questioned the legitimacy of Guatemala-Taiwan relations and could possibly lead to pro-China views favoring the recognition of the PRC instead of the ROC. Portillo was probably neither the first nor the last politician to receive dirty bribes from Taiwan in exchange for maintaining diplomatic recognition.

Moreover, as Guatemala's reputation can be characterized by corruption and human rights issues, the rhetoric of individual leaders of supporting a democratic and 'likeminded' country such as Taiwan can aim to achieve a better status and reputation internationally.

The important role of major leaders in foreign policy decision making is widely accepted. However, it may be hard to prove due to the secretive manner of conducting foreign policy.

6 Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to find an answer to the research question *Why do some states recognize the Republic of China instead of the People's Republic of China despite the possible costs*, and therefore contribute to the academic field of political science with new knowledge on Taiwan's diplomatic recognition through the comparative case studies of the US and Guatemala. The analysis of the primary documents, namely speeches, statements, and interviews given by major political leaders, in combination with media and secondary sources, brought concrete results, and the main findings and their relevance to academia will be discussed and summarized in the following section. The US and Guatemala's relationships with Taiwan are not easy to sum up. As the analysis illustrates, it is crucial for states to balance various factors and evaluate costs and benefits before making any decisions on Taiwan.

The comparison of the US and Guatemala demonstrates how small states are forced to operate according to different logic compared to large states due to their lack of resources in many fields. However, small states have more leeway in decisions such as the recognition of Taiwan, as they do not have so much to lose in the decision.

First of all, the analysis highlights that the entire question around Taiwan's diplomatic recognition is greatly underpinned by the great power competition between the United States and China. The rivalry influences both the US and Guatemalan strategies and decisions concerning Taiwan. When comparing the rhetoric between The US and Guatemala towards the Taiwan question, one main observation was that Guatemala seeks to declare its strong support towards Taiwan and does not hesitate to do it, whereas the US relied more on the strategic ambiguity.

When it comes to the identity and self-perception of the US and Guatemala and how the countries perceive their own role in the international system, the US views itself as a hegemonic competitor of China and therefore has to be a responsible actor promoting peace and stability in the world, and in this case over the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, Guatemala is balancing in between of the major power competition between the US and China. On a structural level, Guatemala's identity is based on being a morally righteous actor in the international community. Furthermore, more regionally, Guatemala views itself as the strongest country and economy in Central America.

Both of the countries have their own interests at play, however, being slightly different. For the US, peace and stability over the Taiwan Strait and maintaining a strong (particularly economic) relationship provide the US has a better chance in the rivalry with China.

The main findings suggest that the US has economic, ideological, and historical reasons to have a strong unofficial relationship with Taiwan; however, the costs to

diplomatically recognize Taiwan would be too big. The US decisions are strictly restricted by the One China policy and the TRA. However, if the US just left Taiwan for China, its position in Asia would be significantly undermined, and China would be able to drive the US out of the region, which could further cause instability in the region and thus create vast economic risks to the US and the whole global economy.

In addition, due to the US-China rivalry, the US has concerns about China expanding its influence in its 'backyard', as China aims to allure Central American countries to switch recognition from Taiwan. It has been a continuous practice of the US to safeguard its 'backyard' already since 1944, when the power rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union began (Carafano et al., 2021). Therefore, the practice has historical connotations.

Which could explain the United States increasing support to Taiwan in various aspects, such as increasing military assistance, economic cooperation and the TAIPEI Act that enables more leeway to the US.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the interests of the US, it is difficult to justify the costs of war in Taiwan compared to the benefits it would gain from recognizing Taiwan's independence. By diplomatically recognizing Taiwan, the US would probably not gain more significant trade or investment opportunities, it would probably not increase the peace and stability in the region, the debate over Taiwan's international participation would not disappear, democracy and human rights would not improve significantly, and finally the China-US relationship would not improve. The costs of war in the Taiwan Strait are more tangible to the US.

For a small state such as Guatemala, it may be more beneficial to recognize Taiwan due to gaining foreign aid, economic support for infrastructure projects, and status and attention in the international system. Based on the benefits that Guatemala already gains from its relationship with Taiwan, it could be questioned whether Guatemala even needs China. Furthermore, as previous cases of small states switching diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China imply, such as Costa Rica, illustrates that the economic benefits have not been as significant as anticipated, which might hinder Guatemala's decision to switch from Taiwan, which already supports Guatemala in vast amounts. Moreover, due to the TAIPEI Act implemented by the US, Guatemala might lose significant support and aid from the US if it decided to switch recognition. Due to the economic benefits that Guatemala gains from its relationship with Taiwan, it could be argued that the sovereign status of small states provided by the Westphalian system and their economic dependence on relationships with other states enable and even encourage them to exchange diplomatic recognition of Taiwan for economic benefits.

Moreover, previous research on Taiwan's diplomatic recognition illustrates that most of the large democratic countries in the world have decided to recognize China over Taiwan, which proves that economic interests typically trump ideological preferences (Hu, 2015, p. 10). However, as the case of Guatemala suggests, ideological factors in foreign policy decisions cannot be ruled out. In fact, the rhetoric of Guatemalan major political actors highlights the role of ideology in their alliance with Taiwan.

As the theoretical framework proposes, small states desire to gain recognition and status from the rest of the world. The analysis confirms this in the case of Guatemala's decision to recognize Taiwan. The strong rhetoric of sending "a clear message to the world that Guatemala stands with Taiwan, and we will work hand-in-hand to become each other's strongest allies and further develop our bilateral ties" (Giammattei, 2019, October 21) illustrates Guatemala's aim to gain recognition and appreciation from the international community by showing that it acts morally right. Furthermore, another factor that can be considered as status seeking is how Guatemala creates in- and outgroups by criticizing other states in order to raise its own status "While other nations change their policies based on fashion, Guatemala remains steadfast. While other nations choose self-interest over friendship, Guatemala remains firm. While other nations manipulate what is right, Guatemala remains steadfast. We remain strong, because it's about justice. We remain firm, because it's about rights. We remain resolute, because it's about an old friendship, and there is no stronger tie than that" (Giammattei, 2023, April 25).

The role of individual leaders points out to be a major factor affecting decision making in both of the cases. While Guatemala strongly reaffirms its ties with Taiwan in speeches and statements, there is a risk that the governing elites are still attracted to the lucrative and alluring markets of China. The next general elections in Guatemala will be held in June 2023, and there has been speculation about some of the candidates supporting the recognition of the PRC as the sole legitimate government. Therefore, if one of those candidates wins the elections, the chances of Guatemala switching recognition from Taiwan would be higher than during previous administrations, as the ideological leanings would shift, which would mean an end to the nearly nine decades of diplomatic ties between Guatemala and Taiwan (Reuters, 2023).

China can be considered to be the total opposite of Taiwan, which has high records of human rights abuses and a lack of democracy, and utilizes its sheer size and economic power to seek recognition. In contrast, the data reveals that Taiwan is seen as a 'Western minded' society, which is a major factor behind both Guatemala's and the United States' strong relationships with Taiwan, whether official or unofficial. Both countries emphasize the freedom of Taiwan to make its own decisions free from coercion and the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

7 Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate why do some states decide to recognize the ROC instead of the PRC, despite the fact that it seems to be more rational to recognize the PRC, which is recognized by the majority of the states. The issue of diplomatic recognition stems from the One China policy that allows countries to diplomatically recognize either Taiwan or China, which consequently allows official ties with only one of them. The comparative case study examines the US and Guatemala's policies towards Taiwan, which were useful in demonstrating the different roles of small states in the international system compared to major powers.

The theoretical framework incorporating constructivism and a concept of small state foreign policy allowed us to explain the question of Taiwan by paying attention to what kind of identities do the states have, how has the international system influenced the identity building, and further, how has the identity influenced foreign policy decisions. The theoretical framework enabled a multifaceted analysis of the factors that influence the country's foreign policy decisions and, therefore, expands the field of research that has used to rely more on economic explanations.

Through the comparative case study of the US and Guatemala, this thesis has shown that the decision to recognize Taiwan is influenced by a complex set of factors that include economic interests, political ideology, and strategic considerations. While the costs of recognizing Taiwan can be high, Guatemala is willing to bear these costs in order to pursue its own interests and values. By shedding light on these factors, this thesis contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of international relations and the role of small states in shaping global politics.

The thesis demonstrates a number of social, political, and economic reasons why Guatemala has maintained extraordinarily strong ties with Taiwan and why the US supports Taiwan so strongly but refrains from officially recognizing it. It also demonstrates that, while the international system has been traditionally dominated by major powers, small states can play a crucial role in the international system. The analysis of Guatemala's foreign policy decisions regarding Taiwan reveals how a small state can shape global politics despite its limited resources and capabilities. The thesis attempts to fill a research gap in the field of international relations for a better understanding of the role of small states in global politics.

The findings illustrate that Guatemala, and the US have two very distinct relationships with Taiwan. Identities of Guatemala and the US as either a small state or a major power influence their role in the international system and are helpful in explaining their decisions concerning Taiwan and its diplomatic recognition.

According to the main findings, Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan could be explained by ideological and historical factors since Guatemala affirms its strong historical ties with Taiwan, which is viewed as a like-minded state sharing the same

values and principles. The relationship with Taiwan is viewed more as a friendship than just a diplomatic alliance. In addition to ideological factors, the research points out the importance of economic aspects since Guatemala receives significant economic support from Taiwan on many issues, such as infrastructure projects, health care, and education. Guatemala also receives aid from the US, which seems to be interested in maintaining the position of Taiwan's current diplomatic allies, which could be at risk if Guatemala switched recognition. The thesis demonstrates that the dynamic rivalry between the United States and China does not only influence the decisions of the US but also shapes Guatemala's decisions. This fact illustrates the relevance of one's role in the international system.

To conclude the US Taiwan policy, the research demonstrates the Taiwan issue is at the center of the China-US power struggle. The US has maintained close ties with Taiwan supporting it militarily, symbolically, and politically; however, following the One China policy and the TRA quite strictly. However, the interpretation of the strict One China policy has changed over time as the US has increased its support to Taiwan.

The US position towards Taiwan is based on the principle of restricting China and supporting like-minded countries. Therefore, the US strategy is not to officially recognize Taiwan but instead diplomatically support Taiwan's current allies in order to maintain a balance of power in the region. The research also shows that the US policy of recognition of China instead of Taiwan reflects its geopolitical interests in maintaining a robust economic relationship with China but simultaneously containing China's power. The findings illustrate that the actions of the US have an important aspect in balancing acts to prevent Chinese aggression over the Taiwan Strait from gaining control of the region. In fact, any changes in the US policy could create a higher risk of triggering a chain of events that could culminate into a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, in the worst case, even to an armed crisis, even though none of the parties desired that outcome.

In the light of China's increasing aggression towards Taiwan, the question of Taiwan's position has received more attention. China's hostile actions risk the security of Taiwan and, as demonstrated in the thesis, the security of the whole world due to the vast spillover effects.

The research illustrates that the recognition of Taiwan is a complex issue, and various factors have to be taken into account when explaining the states' decisions toward Taiwan. It also demonstrates that the international system is not dominated by only major powers, but small states can play an important role in shaping global politics. Finally, the research provides evidence for the importance of the constructivist theory in understanding the dynamics of international relations.

Certain limitations of this research must be emphasized as well. Firstly, in terms of the research method, the research focused on two specific case studies, specifically focusing on their relationship with Taiwan. It allowed the construction of a very narrow research area and thus led to in-depth analysis but, on the other hand, may create a potential pitfall in the generalizability of the research. Secondly, as emphasized in the theoretical framework, small state foreign policies are not homogenous as they are dependent on multilayered domestic and international

factors. Therefore, cases across the field may offer very unique findings in small state foreign policies, which limits the applicability of this thesis to other cases.

The thesis proposes a wide range of possibilities for further research. Firstly, the role of small states in the recognition of Taiwan remains under-researched, and the field could benefit from looking at the Taiwan policies of other small states. Secondly, as the thesis relayed primarily on political leaders' speeches and media, conducting interviews, for example, could offer a different perspective to analyze the recognition of Taiwan.

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