

*THE EXTENT OF THE VENEZUELAN SPACE*

# TERRITORY AND POLITICS: VENEZUELA'S BORDER CONFLICTS

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*“The relations between modern states reach their most critical stage in the form of problems relating to territory.”*

(Hill, 1976, p. 3)

## **ABSTRACT**

This research examines the causes behind the emergence of border conflicts in Venezuela. One of the main objectives is to demonstrate that an internal crisis externalises itself in the shape of territorial disputes. Venezuela's case is tested against other relatively recent border conflicts in South America. This thesis proves the influence of internal crisis and historical precedents on the emergence of border conflicts, and adds value to the existing literature by examining causes instead of consequences.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A queue of people carrying suitcases and bags is moving slowly. One by one, they cross the *Puente Internacional Simón Bolívar*, one of the seventeen main spots where one can cross the border between Venezuela and Colombia. They belong to the group of over 600,000 Venezuelans that try to leave their country. Colombia is not the final goal of their journey, most hope to travel further, to Peru, Ecuador, or even Chile (Sánchez, 2017). The massive fleeing of Venezuelans is a new stage in a long history of border tensions between Colombia and Venezuela, which in turn is part of the greater geopolitical picture of South America (Buendía, 2009). This case shows the vulnerability of the boundaries that separate the South American nation-states. It also demonstrates a connection between migration, geopolitical conflicts and international relations on a higher scale. Tensions are rising at the other side of Venezuela – at the border with Guyana – as well. This territorial dispute, with Venezuela claiming a chunk of Guyanese territory, dates back to 1899 (Serbín, 2001, p. 173). The recent discovery of huge oil reserves just offshore the Guyanese coast gives the century-old conflict a new aspect (Charles, 2015).

At the fringes of the territory of the state - in their border areas - territorial conflicts can arise. Latin America has a history of border disputes (Centeno, 2002, p. 69). To analyse those disputes it is important to define the concepts of boundaries and border disputes. Newman (2010, p. 774) describes borders as “places at which transition from one entity or space into the next takes place [...]”. Although borders can be invisible, as they are also in much of the social and political science literature, a re-emergence of the ‘physicality’ of borders is evident coinciding with the revival of the nation-state in the twenty-first century. This re-emergence is linked to the incorporation of geography in the field of international relations, in which a fixed form of geopolitics plays an important role (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. X). The concept of borders, and the discussion on territorial conflict is situated at the core of geopolitics (Van Houtum, 2005, p. 672). In recent years, scholars of international relations recognise the growing importance of the concept of borders as well as the role of geopolitics within the field of international relations. The connection between geopolitics

and international relations is described by Sánchez Giraldo & Calderón Sánchez (2017, p. 58): “la geopolítica es el estudio de las relaciones internacionales y los conflictos desde una perspectiva geográfica”.

Border disputes are defined by Mandel (1980, p. 431) as “a violent or nonviolent conflict between two primary national antagonists over the demarcation of their shared boundary”. This definition will constitute the basis of a more extensive theoretical overview on the emergence of border conflicts that I will give later. Abramson & Carter’s theory (2016, pp. 28-29) contends that border conflicts especially arise in periods of international crises. An adaptation of their model - with a link between a possible internal crisis and an (external) border conflict - is a hypothesis in the eventual analysis of this research, elaborated in the shape of an independent variable.

### **1.1. Relevance**

The current body of scholarly literature on boundary conflicts primarily concerns the characteristics of conflicts and the development of borders. Border conflicts are not the only cause, but can be an important driving factor behind the rise of inter-state violence (Mares, 2001, p. 53). However, the causes behind the emergence of boundary disputes are still to be explored (Abramson & Carter, 2016, p. 2; Mandel, 1980, p. 427). This implies that the analysis of new disputes should focus on the cause - the reason for its development at a particular time (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, p. 11). This gap in the research on boundary conflicts justifies the necessity of this investigation on the causes of Venezuela’s current border issues.

Internal political leadership assumes the authority of a person or party. Political leaders influence the internal and external decisions made by ‘a nation state’ (Morrell & Hartley, 2006, p. 484). According to Domínguez et al (2003, p. 18) a country needs a certain degree of stability to be able to solve border conflicts. It is possible that the political will to solve border conflicts is there, but a conflict-ridden country - such as Venezuela - is simply not capable to do so. This raises the question of leadership and state capacity: what kind of government is able to prevent, reduce and resolve conflicts with its neighbouring countries?

There has not been written much on the importance of political will in the existence and resolving of interstate boundary conflicts (Msafiri, 2011, p. 2), which means that an investigation into the connection between Venezuela's leadership and its border disputes adds value to the wider scholarly debate on these topics.

This research will address this gap in the literature on the relationship between external boundary disputes and the internal political-historical situation. As Msafiri (2011, p. 25) argues, border disputes "are the legacy of poor governance". A connection between the military regimes, which have been a recurrent feature of Latin American politics, and the emergence of armed conflicts in border areas is a new field to explore. This is interesting in regard to Venezuela's shift to a more authoritarian regime (Corrales, 2015, p. 38).

Drawing on Venezuela's border issues in combination with its internal situation, this research seeks to answer the research question:

***"What are the causes of Venezuela's territorial border disputes with Colombia and Guyana that emerged from 2008 onwards?"***

As Anderson (1999, p. 126) argues, "each boundary is geographically unique and is therefore [...] a special case". Venezuela offers a particularly appropriate case study that helps understanding the emergence and development of border conflicts in South America and beyond. The country is involved in two actual border disputes and finds itself in a situation of internal crisis (Kahn & Tananbaum, 2016, p. 1). For my case study, I will study Venezuela's border conflicts with neighbouring Colombia and Guyana in order to compare them. Apart from that, I will include three other case studies of border conflicts in South America in order to test Venezuela's conflicts. This research question extends beyond Venezuela's boundaries, as it helps understanding the causes of border conflicts in South America.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before turning toward the methodology of research and the actual case of Venezuela, this chapter discusses more general theoretical considerations. The underlying theory of borders, boundaries and how the rise of territorial conflicts forms an integral part of this research. Furthermore, I introduce concepts and categories of border conflicts, as well as a section on domestic policy. These theoretical considerations form a framework to conduct the eventual analysis of research.

### 2.1. Schools of boundaries and borders

The concept of borders is inevitably connected to territory, and the Venezuelan border conflicts cannot be separated from geographical values. Newman (2010, p. 775) argues that there exist two polarised stances on this issue. The first position assumes an intrinsic geographical value, in which borders are the finite end of a fixed territory, in most cases a sovereign state controlled by a government (Latour, 2016, p. 311). At the other side of the border-territory question, one finds a school of thought that perceives borders as a space of interaction and flows of people and goods in the currently globalizing world, where many claim we are heading into a world that would eventually be “borderless” (Newman, 2010, p. 775).

These two competing theories of borders can be combined into one theory using the different concepts of *border* and *boundary*. Borders are “the often hybrid geographical and cultural zones between nations, while boundaries are the legal spatial delimitations of states” (Duany, 2011, p. 1).

#### 2.1.1. Boundaries

A **boundary** forms the transition from one separate territory to another. Apart from constituting the limitation of the territory of a state, boundaries also play a crucial role in the

forming of a national identity (Zimmer, 2003, pp. 179-180). Boundaries mark the 'territorial integrity' and the extent of governmental power of any state (Anderson, 1999, p. 125). The importance of a clear boundary in a geopolitical sense cannot be overstated. Yung Yoon (2014, pp. 77-78) clarifies that "to be complete [a boundary] requires delimitation and demarcation".

One of the earliest attempts to analyse the behaviour of states in congruence with its boundaries, was conducted by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel. According to Ratzel, every state has its own conception on its occupation of space. He called this 'space conception'. These natural limits are the hypothetic boundaries of a state within which it can grow and shrink (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, pp. 6-7). Parodi (2002, p. xiii) describes this as "the gap between what the national territory could be and what it actually is". These theories still have explanatory value for current cases such as Venezuela and its desire to expand its territory in the east, into currently Guyanese soil.

Agnew (1994, p. 53) calls the focus on boundaries as fixed and geographical features the 'territorial trap'. This territorialism is grounded in three geographic assumptions - states as the central unit, the contradiction between interior and exterior, and states as the measurement for societies. These assumptions are linked to main theories in international relations, wherein the territorial state plays the central agent. Likewise, Martel (1980, p. 429) argues that boundaries and territory still play a pivotal role in international relations. Notions such as 'interior / exterior' and the 'state before the nation' are assumptions as well as consequences of the territorial trap (Agnew & Corbrige, 1995, pp. 29-31). Geopolitical concepts and the study of international relations are intertwined. *Territorial or rigid boundary theory* is therefore of great value to this research, since it helps explaining territorial disputes.

### 2.1.2. Borders

'Borderless' thinking coincides with Duany's concept of **borders**. Van Houtum (2005, pp. 672-674) observes the fact that a general shift from boundary to border has taken place in the academic world. In his opinion, a border is a more complex concept of socio-spatial

differentiation. However, criticisms on this post-modern way of thinking argue that it maintains an inherent spatial thinking.. He contends that the new way of thinking about borders also takes away the state focus. Borders can be applied to regions, cities, continents and other entities. Nowadays, these kinds of borders - often as a space of trade, migration and other transnational activities (Duany, 2011) - are more blurry than the rigid boundaries that dissect the globe on political maps. The *fluid* or *network borders* are an important concept in this research, particularly in the migration-prone border issue with Colombia.

## 2.2. The emergence of border conflicts

This debate on the conceptualisation of borders gives some background for definitions and explanations of border conflicts. The thesis uses a working definition of a border conflict based on Mandel's definition: "a violent or nonviolent conflict between two sovereign states over the territorial demarcation of their shared land boundary." It is important to keep two characteristics of this definition in mind. First, this research assumes that to border another country, both countries have to share a land boundary. Hence, maritime claims do not play a role in this research. Second, a use of force is not exclusively needed to name tension in a border conflict. Instead of considering various definitions, this paragraph is dedicated to a review of the literature on more specific characteristics of border disputes, as well as the factors that cause them to emerge.

Although the consequences of border disputes have been extensively studied, there is a surprisingly big lacuna in the scholarly literature regarding the causes of emerging border disputes and eventual conflicts (Abramson & Carter, 2016, p. 2; Mandel, 1980, p. 427). People and states are triggered to fight over the valuable good of territory. However, these conflicts are often fought because of relatively small amounts of territory (Goemans & Schultz, 2017, pp. 31-33). In the scholarly literature, three factors are identified to play a role in claims over territory: economic, military-strategic and ethnic-cultural factors. Territorial conflicts are almost always location specific. The claims and conflict do not take place along the entirety of the border, but rather in smaller sections where the aforementioned factors are causing conflict. Goemans & Schultz (2017, pp. 34-35; pp. 60-61) explain the ethnic cause of a border conflict. If an ethnic group is divided by a certain border and has a position of

power in state A and a disadvantaged position in state B, these conditions can lead to a border conflict. The economic factor consists of the relation between territory and natural resources (Mandel, 1980, p. 429). In the military-strategic sphere, Mandel (ibidem) explains that “standing firm on its border claims” means that a state maintains or gains its diplomatic influence. Abramson & Carter (2016, pp. 28-29) point at the timing of territorial conflicts. They observe a rise in border tensions in periods of crisis in the international system, and this rise of territorial claims adds to uncertainty in already uncertain times.

There is also an important fourth factor to take into account when it comes to the development of territorial disputes. Historical boundaries that existed before are often to be found in the proximity of current boundaries and continue to influence state behaviour. If there is no historical precedent - which is often the case in Latin America - there is the possibility of a geographical incentive. ‘Natural boundaries’ such as rivers and mountain ranges attract states and hence can provoke a shift away from artificial boundaries (ibid, 2016, pp. 6-8). This is linked to Ratzel’s *space conception*.

Concluding, these four factors play a role in the emergence of boundary conflicts: 1) ethnic factors; 2) military factors; 3) economic factors; 4) historical and geographical precedents. Furthermore, boundary disputes are more likely to occur in times of crisis. Finally, the political or ideological factor plays an important role (Msafiri, 2011; Child, 1988, p. 380). These two factors are often omitted in the traditional literature, but are of possible causal importance. This leads to: 5) crisis factor; 6) political factor. This thesis explores the internal causal links that underlie territorial disputes and seeks to investigate the importance of aforementioned factors. Throughout the analysis, I will test the established hypotheses of the scholarly literature by making use of the data concerning the recent conflicts in Venezuela.

### **2.3. Terminology: boundary, border and frontier**

Previously, this theoretical review introduced the different schools of borders and boundaries. This paragraph gives more specific terminologies for the terms *border*, *boundary* and *frontier* (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, pp. 11-12), which will be used throughout the research.

- A **boundary** is a marked line that separates two political entities from each other.
- A **border** is the area around the outer boundary of a political entity. The term is synonym to *borderland* and comprises the area within a state but on the edges of that same state. It is an undefined portion of territory buffering the national boundary.
- A **frontier** represents the distinction between habited and inhabited land. It also is the line between the territory under a state's sovereign control and uncontrolled land. Frontier areas are located in remote and unpopulated areas.

#### 2.4. Categorisation of border conflicts

The causes and outcomes of conflicts between states are closely related to the type of inter-state conflict. Furthermore, the nature of these conflicts influences the intensity of a certain dispute. Child (1988, pp. 379-380) provides a typology of six different kinds of inter-state conflicts.

- **Territorial conflicts** are the most common type of conflict in Latin America. Countries possess opposing claims on certain chunks of territory. These conflicts generally stem from vaguely defined borders from the colonial times. Nowadays, these conflicts comprise maritime disputes as well. Territorial conflicts are often connected to Abramson & Carter's historical factor and the *frontier* concept. Although borders cause this kind of conflict, the conflict does not concern the border itself, but rather a shift of the border.
- **Border conflicts** are to be described as tensions *in* the borderlands. In the past, these conflicts were not particularly prevalent in Latin America since many border sections crossed remote and lowly populated areas. However, population growth, drug-related smuggling and refugee migrations have made the borderlands more susceptible to conflict.
- **Resource conflicts** have a strong link with territory. However, in these cases it is not an area on the map that is at stake, but the resources in the ground. Oil and gas are goods that can provoke resource conflicts, just like water and food supplies. Strategic

resources are also considered part of this kind of conflicts. Hence, resource conflicts contain both the economic and the military-strategic factor of Mandel.

- **Ideological conflicts** emerge between two states with different political systems and leaders with different ideologies. Bearing in mind the Bolivarian revolutions, this conflict is very relevant in contemporary South America.
- **Influence conflicts** arise because of national attempts to enlarge its influence and power beyond its borders.
- **Migratory conflicts** generally follow after - internal - crises, thus giving one explanation for Abramson & Carter's crisis hypothesis. These demographic conflicts arise because of the movements of refugees and exiles across international borders and are an extension of the aforementioned *border conflicts*.

The interesting facets of Child's typology are the linkages that exist between the different kinds of conflict. Territorial conflicts and resource conflicts are closely related, just like migratory conflicts and border conflicts. Different types of conflict also do not necessarily exclude each other. Several of these theoretical categories of conflicts can be applied to Venezuela. As will be explained in the case studies, the territorial historical conflict and the resource conflict are both typical for Venezuela's dispute with Guyana. The current Venezuela-Colombia tensions fit in the border conflict category but also have the characteristics of a migratory conflict. Finally, the entirety of Venezuela's foreign affairs could be described as a set of ideological conflicts. The validity of these statements will be further explored in the analysis. The categorisation of border conflicts will serve as a theoretical framework that I will assess in relation with Venezuela's border conflicts.

Although the previous conflict typology clarifies the differences in nature between boundary disputes, the question of intensity of a certain conflict remains. Anderson (2003) designed a model to predict a specific boundary's susceptibility to conflict. This mathematical model consists of two indices: potential boundary accessibility and potential political instability. By multiplying these, the geopolitical index for a shared land boundary is obtained. By weighing the different portions of the land boundary, one finds the index for the national land boundary vulnerability of a specific state. The range of the index varies between 0 and 25, with the latter representing the highest geopolitical index and thus the highest susceptibility to border conflict (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, pp. 10-11).

Venezuela shares its land boundaries with three other sovereign states - Colombia, Guyana and Brazil. The shared boundary with Colombia follows different rivers and streams such as the Orinoco River. With a potential geographical accessibility of 3 and a potential political instability score of 3.5, the geopolitical index for the Venezuelan-Colombian boundary is 10.5. The border with Guyana is adjacent to Guyana Esequiba, the contested area. With an accessibility of 3 and an instability of 4, this boundary has a geopolitical index of 12. If these two scores are compared to the 0 index of the Venezuelan-Brazilian border, it is clear that Venezuela's territorial problems lie at its east and west. Venezuela's average geopolitical index equals 5. According to Anderson's data, the possibility of conflict at the Venezuelan-Guyanese border is of the same level as the Israeli-Jordan border. The Colombian side can be compared to the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border tensions, which came to an eruption in 1995 (Anderson, 2003, pp. 879-884).

Although this data gives an insight in a quantitative method to approach the border tensions of Venezuela in a global perspective, one has to keep in mind that this is an oversimplification of the geopolitical reality. Furthermore, the values attached to the border conflict susceptibility might have changed by now, since the tensions with Colombia and Guyana have risen recently. Anderson's model does not take into account other factors such as natural resources or historical precedents. This makes this model inadequate to explain Venezuela's current border tensions. By analysing other possible factors in another time frame, this research complements this model and adds value to the knowledge on the interaction between qualitative causal factors and quantitative outcomes of border conflict intensity.



**Figure 2.1** Venezuela's contested boundaries, border crossings and claim in Guyana

Source: F.J. Wolters, own adaptation of *d-maps*, 'República Bolivariana de Venezuela - boundaries, names'

## 2.5. The internal-external nexus

The topic of border conflicts in Venezuela is inherently connected to the interplay between internal and external political factors. Earlier, the theory of Abramson & Carter (2016, p. 12; pp. 28-29) was introduced. Their model is based upon the assumption that internal crises can lead to *systemic uncertainty*. A period of high systemic uncertainty implies a crisis in the interconnected international system, such as during the periods of the World Wars. These systemic crises correlate with states pressing their latent territorial claims, since the costs are lower. After all, the managers of the international system are occupied with a crisis and do not possess the ability to intervene in other border conflicts. It is important to consider the fact that the majority of the latent claims are never brought into practice (ibid, p. 1; p. 6; p. 10).

However, by modifying this model to make it applicable to the Venezuelan context, this research takes a different angle on the crisis - border conflict reciprocity. The hypothesis contends that Venezuela is the reversed case of the systemic uncertainty model. Instead of an international crisis, the country is prone to an internal crisis. One would logically argue that the attention of the government would then be shifted toward domestic affairs to mend the crisis. My hypothesis is that internal crises can lead to a focus on territorial conflicts with neighbouring states as a way of *externalising* the domestic problems. An internal crisis is easily extended beyond a country's borders - as in the case of the Maduro Administration with its claim in Guyana (Quintana, 2018).

Since this research explores internal causes as a way to explain a rise in border conflicts, the starting point is the domestic government of a state involved in border conflicts. The inevitable question regarding a country's government concerns its ideology and their type of leadership (Child, 1988, p. 380). To connect the internal with the external, first, this section of theory turns toward the latter. Different concepts of leadership are introduced to construct a way of understanding the case. In the next chapter, the specific history and ideology of Venezuela will be outlined.

**Political stability** has a reciprocal role regarding border conflicts with neighbouring states. Political instability can be a cause of territorial border conflicts, as a weak state has to 'prove' its sovereignty at an international stage, thus threatening regional peace. Domestic



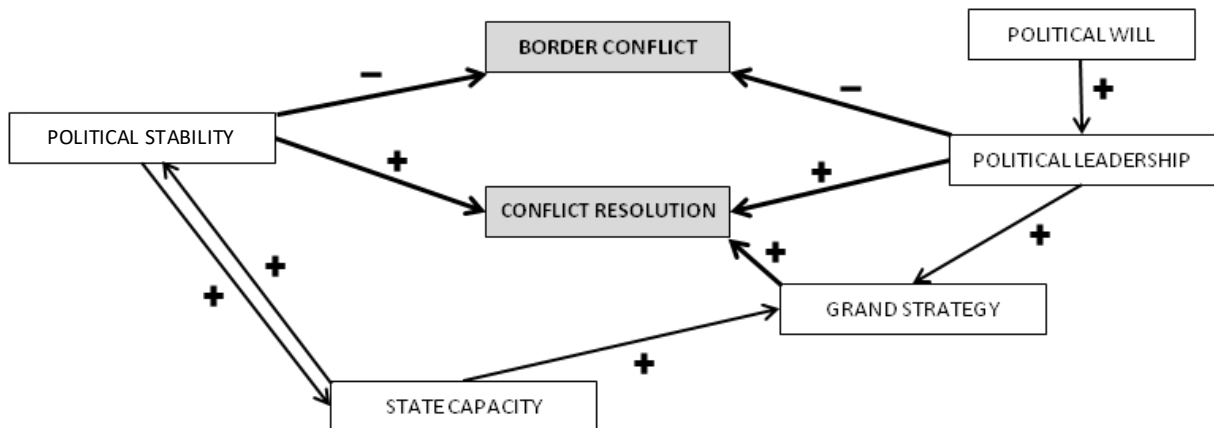
political instability is a consequence of poor governance and hence it is connected to the leadership factor: “bad leaders breed instability and insecurity” (Msafiri, 2011, p. 17-34). By turning toward a territorial dispute with a neighbouring state, the internal political struggles of a state are ‘externalised’. The instability factor is connected to crisis hypothesis. In turn, border conflicts also deteriorate the domestic political stability in a state. For example, an external threat can be used by nationalist movements and the military to justify a strong nation-state and thus the overthrow of a democratic government (Mares, 2001, p. 55). A democratically stable government is important in regard of conflict prevention, as democracies behave peaceful toward each other, in line with the Democratic Peace Theory (Schwarz, 2007, pp. 4-5).

The concept of *political will* is inherently connected to political leadership. It could be described as the force that drives political action (Msafiri, 2011, pp. 35-36). The intention to implement certain policies, such as solving border conflicts, is as important as leadership qualities. A strong political will would imply that leaders show the electorate that the costs of a conflict are eventually larger than the costs of a resolution (Mares, 2001, p. 49). As Mares (2001, p. 81) has described political will: “la política es el arte de lo posible”.

A fourth concept regarding the internal side of territorial disputes is *state capacity*. This notion relates to a states’ “ability to implement official goals” (Knutsen, 2013, p. 2). To arrive at a high level of state capacity, a state requires a high-quality bureaucratic system and strong enforcement mechanisms. State capacity is thus not constructed around one leader, but on the entire governmental apparatus. Based on this theory, international relations scholars divide the international system in ‘weak states’ and ‘strong states’. Whether a state has a high state capacity is not dependent on the regime type (Schwarz, 2007, p. 5). The grade of state capacity correlates with problem solving capabilities. For example, although the political will to solve a territorial dispute may be present, small states generally lack the resources to succeed (Domínguez et al, 2003, p. 9).

To conclude this section on the internal-external nexus, one should consider the theory on *grand strategy*. If a state follows a grand strategy, it possesses an external political agenda to fulfil internal objectives such as prosperity and increasing sovereignty. This also implies that the foreign diplomacy of this state does not let individual cases - such

as a specific territorial conflict - obstruct its broader objectives. Thus, a grand strategy solves border disputes. Indeed, a border conflict is not desirable for a state, since it means an increase of political instability and deteriorates its international competitiveness. Furthermore, these conflicts can paradoxically damage state sovereignty since defending certain territorial claims or areas comes at a high cost. Defending the territory that can be defended and improving the legitimacy of its sovereignty is often preferable (Mares, 2001, pp. 78-81).



**Figure 2.2** Model demonstrating the links between domestic political factors and conflict (resolution)  
Source: F.J. Wolters

The flowchart model in figure 2.2 visualises a hypothesis of the described domestic political factors and their mutual links as well as their influence on either the emergence of a border conflict or the prevention of border tensions. A grand strategy as well as a democratically stable state and a capable political leader are of essential importance for the existence and possible resolution of a border conflict. In turn, political will and state capacity influence these factors. The model clarifies the influence of domestic factors on an international boundary dispute. However, this is only a hypothesis and the analysis of Venezuela will assess whether the model is valuable.

The theories that have been discussed throughout this framework are the basis for the in-depth case study of Venezuela and the eventual analysis. Before focusing on the comparative case studies, one needs to understand the background of South American border disputes and the history of Venezuela.

### 3. BACKGROUND

#### 3.1. Border disputes in South America

From the first Pacific War that started in 1836 to the Ecuadorian-Peruvian conflict in 1995 (Centeno, 2002, pp. 56-57), territorial conflicts appear as an integral part of South America. However, a key feature of the border tensions in South America is the fact that they very rarely lead to war. Only 5 percent of those disputes have led to taking up arms, against 62 percent in European history (Centeno, 2002, p. 69). This is especially striking if one thinks about the common correlation between boundary conflicts and the emergence of war (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, p. 6). Compared to Africa, the South American boundaries are perceived as more 'natural' and more stable (Parodi, 2002, p. xi). Briscoe (2008, pp. 1-2) explains the current day geopolitical situation on the continent. Although violence rates keep thriving in border areas, there is quite some stability if one takes the official inter-state situation into consideration. Officially, there are almost no disputes over the demarcation of territory and real armed conflicts between opposing states have vanished. However, he agrees on the instability in South American border areas and he admits that the diplomatic tensions between Venezuela and Colombia have been rising. This is in line with the observation by Domínguez et al (2003, p. 13) that boundary disputes on the continent endure, with five armed disputes since 2000. This poses an interesting puzzle. Boundary conflicts persist and inter-state conflicts are common, but simultaneously inter-state territorial wars are rare.

As Franco (2016, p. 1) states, "any analysis of South America's current political boundaries requires a [...] historical basis". The territorial disputes and eventual geopolitical changes that South America has experienced throughout its history originate in the colonial times, when the continent was divided along actual boundaries for the first time. Although the Portuguese former colony of Brazil remained intact after its independence, the Spanish territory was scattered among a variety of modern states. This is of importance since these former Spanish colonies still have bilateral conflicts over territory - such as the conflict between Colombia and Venezuela. The reason for these different outcomes is that

Portugal's colony was heavily centralised, while the Spanish followed a decentralised path. Although the original viceroyalty of Peru had covered most Spanish possessions for over two centuries, by 1778 the empire consisted of four viceroyalties and two captaincy-generals. Venezuela had originally belonged to the viceroyalty of New Granada together with Panama, Colombia and Ecuador but had become an autonomous district in 1777. Political and economic grudges led to the eventual fight for independence, which was accelerated by Napoleon's conquest of Spain. Venezuela was incorporated by the newly formed Republic of Gran Colombia, but split off in 1830 (Franco, 2016, p. 500).

The border conflicts that would emerge from the struggle for independence did generally concern unexplored and sparsely populated areas. This was strengthened by the fact that "the internal divisions of Spain's South American Empire [...] weren't meant to function as defined national boundaries" (ibid, pp. 501-502). However, Simón Bolívar had asserted that the newly independent states should follow the lines of the ancient Spanish administration in his principle of *uti possidetis juris*. This was based on practical considerations as well as the legitimacy of the South American states. This principle still influences the disputes between Spanish-speaking countries while the Brazilian borders are grounded in the principle of *uti possidetis de facto*, or occupational presence (Parodi, 2002, pp. 5-7). "The fragmentation of Spain's South American Empire led to the need to transform ambiguous colonial boundaries into clearly defined international borders" to let them comply with Bolívar's principle (Franco, 2016, p. 506).

Argentina and Chile signed a treaty on Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in 1881. The foregoing conflict between the two Southern Cone countries is exemplary for the consequences of the Spanish colonial heritage. The territory in the southern tip of South America had always been marked as a 'neutral Indian territory' on Spanish colonial maps, thus leading to competing Chilean and Argentine claims. The most well-known boundary dispute in South America is arguably the War of the Pacific (1879-1904) between Chile, Bolivia and Peru. The Atacama Desert formed Bolivia's access to the ocean, but vague boundaries meant that the region had been subject to claims immediately after independence. After the discovery of nitrate resources in the region, a conflict between Chile and the Bolivian-Peruvian allied forces arose, eventually leading to an extension of Chilean territory and Bolivia becoming a landlocked country. This conflict perfectly

demonstrates the combination between colonial legacy and resource conflicts. (Franco, 2016, p. 503). The most iconic conflict of the twentieth century took place between the United Kingdom and Argentina and concerned the Falkland Islands. These islands were originally part of the Spanish viceroyalty Rio de la Plata and were included in the Argentine territory upon its independence in 1816. However, British forces conquered the islands in 1833. This led to diplomatic negotiations between the two countries for over a century and the outbreak of the Falkland War in 1982. The British sovereignty over the islands was strengthened after victory in this war. Ecuador and Peru went to war in 1995 because they disagreed over their common boundary. This 'Cenepa conflict' was influenced by vague boundary demarcations by the Spanish during colonial times. Similarly, the conflict between Venezuela and Guyana is the result of the remnants of European imperialism. The territorial claim of Venezuela on Guyanese territory stems from a dispute that arose in nineteenth century and was ostensibly settled in 1899 (ibid, p. 504-505). Afterwards, this conflict has intensified several times, as is explained in the case study in chapter 5.

### **3.2. Venezuelan political history and oil**

To acquire an understanding of the context of the border conflicts analysed in this thesis, one has to bear in mind the particular situation of Venezuela. Natural resources have played a key role in Venezuela's history and political situation. Venezuela played a key role in founding the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960 (Coronil, 1997, pp. 49-55). Post-independence Venezuelan history can be roughly divided in three stages: before the discovery of oil, after the discovery of oil, and the Bolivarian era. Indigenous people had used petroleum for centuries, but the product only gained commercial value in the nineteenth century. The first petrol company of Venezuela was the *Petrolia Oil Company* established in 1878. After the establishment of a well near Lake Maracaibo in 1914, oil became the leading export product in 1926 (Tinker Salas, 2015, pp. 59-62). With the increase in oil production, employment in the sector grew substantially. This caused flows of internal migration. For the first time in history, Venezuelans from different parts of the country mingled, creating a sense of nationhood (ibid, pp. 62-64).

In the first half of the twentieth century, Venezuela slowly moved toward democracy, with the first open elections in 1947. Elected president Rómulo Gallegos was soon overthrown in a military coup headed by another Andean - Marcos Pérez Jiménez (ibid, pp. 78-86). The 1950s signified an influx of Colombian immigrants that endured for the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, Colombian-Venezuelan relations are heavily intertwined with migration issues. From 1959 onwards, the Venezuelan democracy was restored after the reign of dictator Pérez Jiménez. Among them was Carlos Andrés Pérez, who nationalised the Venezuelan oil industry and created the national company *Petróleos de Venezuela* [PdVSA]. Oil had improved Venezuelan living standards, as the country had the highest South American GDP per capita in 1974 (ibid, pp. 105-106). By 1992, Venezuela was one of the oldest democracies in South America (Batista Pereira et al, 2013). Venezuela's status as an oil producing country is important for understanding its political, economic, and social development.

### 3.3. The Bolivarian revolution

Despite its democratic tradition, Venezuela experienced a military coup in 1992. The coup was led by lieutenant coronel Hugo Chávez and his *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200* [MBR 200]. The organisers of the coup were socialists and had support of large sections of the population. MBR 200 was founded in 1982 inspired by the ideas of Simón Bolívar. However, the coup attempt of 1992 failed, as Pérez was not captured and Chávez and his allies were sent into prison (Tinker Salas, 2015, pp. 122-125). Six years later, Chávez participated in the elections of 1998. He rose in the electoral polls as the people distrusted the established politicians because of their austerity measures and corruption. On December 6, 1998, Chávez became the 62<sup>nd</sup> president of Venezuela (ibid, pp. 132-135).

Chávez's ideas gave birth to a movement that is known as the Bolivarian Revolutions or Bolivarianism, called after South American independence hero Bolívar. Venezuela under Hugo Chávez forms the center of the rise of leftist governments in South America in the past two decades (Lupien, 2015, pp. 320-322). His election was followed by a 'hyper presidential'

new constitution. The country's name was altered to the *Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, indicating the influence of the Bolivarian movement. Furthermore, the bicameral legislative body was abolished (Tinker Salas, 2015, p. 138). Eventually, the Bolivarian government was able to control 93 percent of the seats in the assembly. Lastly, the Supreme Court was modified as Chávez's allies were installed to legally support *chavismo*. These developments point toward the process of Venezuela becoming increasingly undemocratic (Kott, 2012, pp. 77-78; Freedom House, 2018).

The Bolivarian revolutions have arguably caused Venezuela to become an authoritarian or hybrid state (Corrales, 2015; Corrales & Penfold, 2015, pp. 1-14). When PdVSA employees went on strike against the Chávez administration, the Venezuelan economy was hit hard because of its oil dependence. Chávez reacted by firing and replacing large sections of the national petrol company. However, this meant a loss of human capital and a stagnating oil production (Kott, 2012, pp. 78-79). Chávez presidential regime lasted for fourteen years. On March 5, 2013, he died after a period of illness. His successor was his vice-president Nicolás Maduro, who has been accused of taking over power illegally. However, he won the elections of 2013 and assumed presidency. Maduro's mother is from the Colombian border city of Cúcuta. (Tinker Salas, 2015, p. 207, p. 210). This demonstrates that the border conflict between Venezuela and Colombia is probably of personal importance to Maduro.

### 3.4. Oil dependency

Dependence on natural resources is a characteristic that plays an important role in Venezuela's internal political situation and international position. The dependency theories that characterise the analyses of economic development of South America are based on the structuralist thinkers of the Economic Commission for Latin America [ECLA] (O'Toole, 2011, p. 424; pp. 433-434). They basically argue that the development of a country is the product of the historical evolution within the capitalist system, which implies that less developed countries find themselves in this position due to colonial exploitation.

Why is a resource-rich country with the opportunities of Venezuela still characterised by political and economic instability (Kott, 2012, p. 69)? The answer to this question is not

simple. A dependency theorist would point to the profits of the natural resources that flow to foreign companies, making a resource-rich state dependent upon foreign capital. Mahdavy (1970, pp. 465-466) signalled this phenomenon and labelled it a *rentier state*. The concept of the rentier state links the internal form of the state to its foreign policy. Since these states are heavily dependent on the export of their natural resources, their foreign policy tends to be inherently economic. Domestically, rentier states are characterised by a strong security system, but an absence of an actual democracy (Schwarz, 2007, pp. 1-2).

Schwarz (2007, pp. 13-14) argues that rentier states are prone to internal conflict. The three core functions of a stable state are the provision of security, the provision of representation and the provision of welfare. The archetypical rentier state lacks a provision of representation while the welfare provision can deteriorate during an economic low. An imbalance in these functions can be the starting point of state failure. The collapse of a rentier state would cause an immense internal crisis, which, in turn, influences border issues. Apart from economic instability, an economic monoculture can bring about an increasing authoritarianism. Analyses have found that resource-rich nations tend to be more autocratic. The public resource rents replace taxation as a state income, which signifies more central government power and a decreased level of popular representation (Kott, 2012, p. 72). Chávez's and Maduro's policies are concentrated on maintaining power using resource revenues. Their strict economic policies stagnated the Venezuelan economy, leading to the highest inflation at a rate of 28.9 percent. Venezuela is ranked in the lower part of the Democracy Index and is described as 'the worst offender of freedom of press' after Cuba (ibid, p. 75, p. 77, pp. 81-82). Hence, Venezuela's political and economic systems have specific characteristics. The oil dependency, the autocratic shift toward a hybrid regime and the colonial past all shape the context for the analysis of Venezuela's border disputes.



## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research limits itself to two land boundary disputes. Both cases are united by the fact that Venezuela is one of the conflicting actors. This stable factor makes the cases comparable. Out of this comparability follows the research method. I have chosen the methodology of a between-case analysis as the most apt way of conducting research.

This study includes a small number of cases that will be compared on their independent variables. Mahoney (2000, p. 387) calls this a *small-N analysis*. All these cases have the same outcome, or dependent variable: either border conflict or border tension, although they differ in intensity. The relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable indicates the search for a causal relationship. Each independent variable will be 'tested' within different categories, a so-called nominal case comparison (ibid, pp. 387-391). To bridge the differences in type and intensity of outcomes - ranging from border tensions to armed conflicts - the categorisation of border disputes that has been introduced in the literature review is valuable. The comparisons drawn are both cross-case and over-time comparisons. This means that the different cases are tested throughout time on different moments (Bennett & Elman, 2007, p. 176). The independent variables are the causes of the dependent variable, and hence preceded the outcome of the border conflict.

This research includes five cases, that are selected around the central cases Venezuela-Colombia and Venezuela-Guyana. I scrutinise these cases on a set of independent variables, namely the political, the economic, the military-strategic, the historical-geographical- and the crisis variable. The eventual dependent variable is the emergence of a border conflict. While analysing these different cases, the central question is whether the variables are applicable to the Venezuela case. It is important to note that the eventual border conflicts are not of the same intensity and may vary on a continuum ranging from a political tension to an armed conflict. This way of doing research is a comparative research method.

A qualitative way of doing research is necessary because both border conflicts combine a great amount of intertwined factors best understood using theory and

methodology from fields such as international relations, geopolitics but also economics and sociology. Drawing on the aforementioned over-time comparisons, a time line will set out the context per individual conflict (Buckley, 2016, pp. 894-895). These time scales provide clarity and place individual events in a wider context. I categorise the events in different stages, adjusted to the separate conflicts: 1) pre-conflict; 2) determining event; 3) rising tensions; 4) actual conflict. These stages are useful to compare paths toward a territorial border conflict between two sovereign states. However, one has to keep in mind that these stages are arbitrary 'blocks' created in a historiographical manner. This model serves to scrutinise the hypothesis that border disputes tend to increase in times of internal crisis. Hence, I connect internal tensions to the border conflicts of Venezuela. The expectation is that economic values will prevail in the discourse around the Guyana-case while a more complex combination of factors shapes the conflict with Colombia. Thus, there will be a strong link between the analysis and the theoretical framework.

#### **4.1. Congruence analysis**

Within the small-N research designs, this thesis follows a congruence analysis research method. A congruence analysis uses case studies to prove the relative strength of a theory empirically (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, pp. 144-145). In this research it is not a specific theory that I test, but my set of hypotheses. The hypothesis that internal politics influence border tensions and the hypothesis that territorial disputes tend to rise in times of domestic crisis form the basis of this 'theory'. This is in line with the practice of "deducing specific [...] predictions from abstract theory and comparing these with empirical observations" (ibid, p. 146). This combination of theories, grounded in the literature, is analysed through the set of divergent variables, which in turn will be described in a qualitative manner, hence giving space to an in-depth congruence analysis. The set of independent variables facilitates the research of additional causal links apart from the two mentioned hypotheses. Blatter & Haverland (2012, p. 144) contend that the small-N analysis is the appropriate mode of research to compare and possibly combine different theoretical paradigms. In the case of border and boundary studies, this is a valuable asset.

The chosen time frame, spans the period between March 2008 and July 2017. This is based on two events: the diplomatic crisis between Venezuela and Colombia in 2008 and the discovery of huge oil reserves in Guyana in January 2017 (Matute Urdanete, 2015; Krauss, 2017). This period gives the possibility to research the rising border tensions. The time period and the whole research are intertwined with the context of the rise of the Bolivarian movement since Chávez took power in 1999 (Lupien, 2015, pp. 319-320). The time frame consist of two episodes of high conflict intensity, the first being a diplomatic crisis between Colombia and Venezuela, also including Ecuador, the second being Venezuela's current conflicts with its neighbours. The three other comparative case studies are set in different time frames.

#### 4.2. Case studies

The following cases shape the basis of this research. Two of them are the 'central cases' of Venezuela-Colombia (2008-) and Venezuela-Guyana (2017-). The other cases are not the central axis of this research, but rather support the central cases by comparability. I set these three cases out in a separate 'test chapter', with the objective to compare Venezuela's border conflicts with other border conflicts in South America. This chapter serves for understanding whether the causes of border conflicts apply to Venezuela, or are applicable to South America more generally as well. It is important to note that cases vary in time and space.<sup>1</sup>

- Venezuela - Colombia
- Venezuela - Guyana
- *Ecuador - Peru*. This conflict is the most recent violent inter-state conflict in South America. This war took place in 1995. The conflict had to do with Spanish colonial edicts (Domínguez et al, 2003, p. 9).
- *Chile - Bolivia / Peru*. Historically Chile has had a tense relationship with these two neighbouring countries as Chile caused Bolivia's loss of access to the sea. In the late 1970s, these tensions reached a new high (ibid, p. 18).

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett & Elman, 2007

- *Chile - Argentina*. This case includes a near-war situation between the two southern countries in 1978 over some islands near Tierra del Fuego (ibidem).

#### 4.3. Independent variables

The case studies are tested on a set of five different independent variables, to see if and in what way the presence of these variables leads to the emergence of tensions over borders with neighbouring countries. These variables are grounded in the theory of writers such as Mandel and Goemans & Schultz. The ethnic factor has been left out because it does not emerge as a significant cause of border conflict in the region. South America has less ethno-linguistic heterogeneity than other regions that have experienced significant border conflict during the same period, including Africa (Elbadawadi & Sambanis, 2000, p. 26). South American states have not necessarily clashed with each other over ethnic issues during the period I am considering. Ethnic issues form more of an internal matter (Ross, 2014). Instead, the variable of the internal political situation has been added. The possible influence of the political environment on the existence of border disputes is in line with Domínguez's claim that internal political decisions influence territorial disputes (2003, p. 18). The other factors - combined with the crisis hypothesis - result in the following independent variables:

- *Political environment variable*. This is an important variable regarding the hypothesis of the connection between internal politics and border conflicts. It refers to the state capacity as well as the type of government in a certain country. Are we talking about a democracy, an authoritarian state, a military regime? The research will demonstrate whether there are links between the regime type and the presence of border conflicts. The database that I use for the political measurement is *Polity IV*, an index measuring autocratic levels in the world from 1946 onwards. A description of this index rating and the graphs for the concerned countries can be found in the appendixes. Furthermore, *Freedom House* and *Democracy Index* are more recent sources for Venezuela.
- *Economic variable*. This is closely related to natural resources (Mandel, 1980, p. 429). In this research, the importance of natural resources to the respective economy and the discovery of natural resources is scrutinised through data sets on trade.

- *Military-strategic variable*. How important is a certain border for the military interests of both countries? What state are diplomatic relations between both countries in? The main sources are reports of the respective governments and media.
- *Historical and geographical precedents*. This variable refers to the former existence of other borders or the proximity of mountain ranges, rivers or other geographical features. This is connected to natural resources to some extent. This factor is tested through maps and treaties.
- *Crisis variable*. The question this variables seeks to answer is that of the political situation in the country before and during the border conflict. Was there some type of crisis? I will use varying sources to test this variable.

Within each case study, I describe the presence, nature and intensity of the variables in a qualitative manner, based on data gathered in secondary literature as well as statistics and government reports. The final part of each case study contains a table representing a continuum for weighing the importance of the variables.

#### **4.4. From research to conclusions**

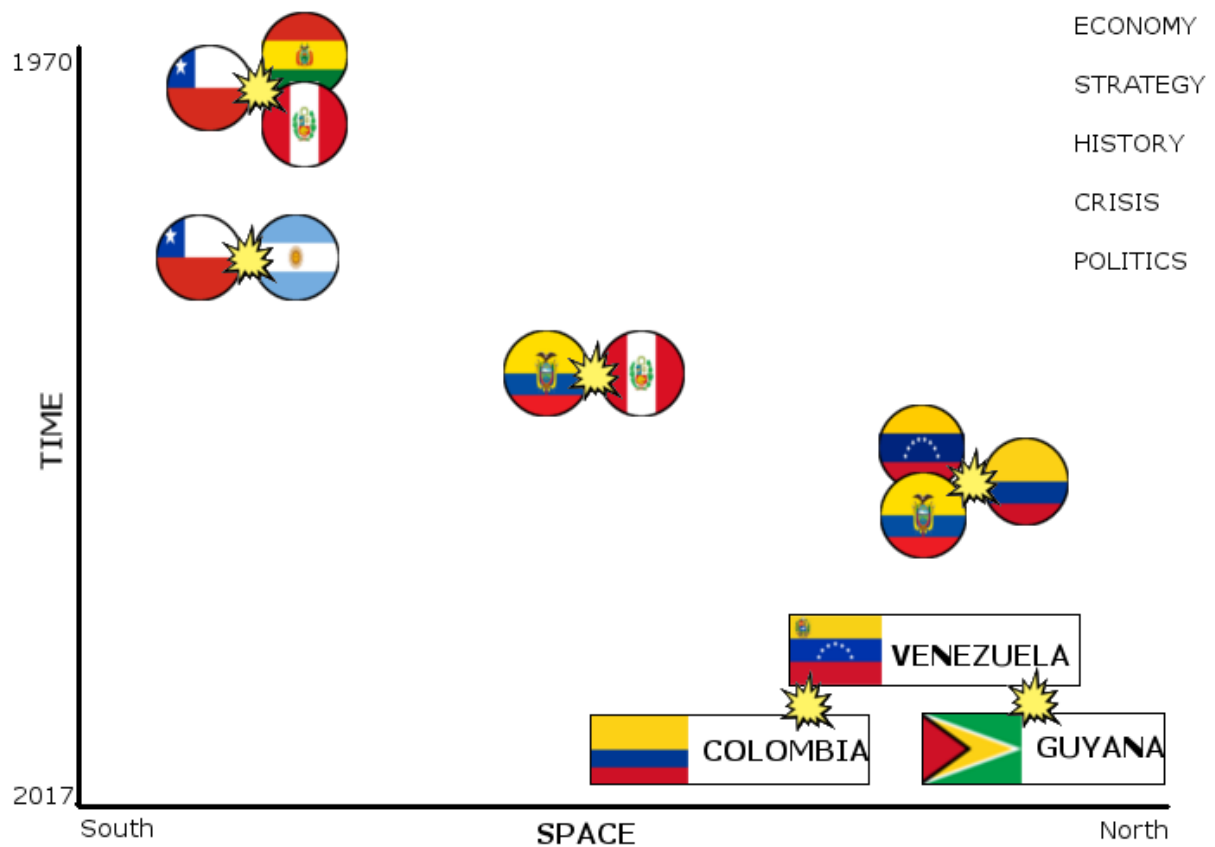
The research design that I have set out in these paragraphs is the basis for the eventual research and the conclusions, discussions, and recommendations that I will draw from the analysis. The between-case and congruence analyses have the advantage that Venezuela is not separated but will be placed in a wider South American context, hence contributing to the validity of this research. The independent variables and case studies shape a clear framework in which the research is conducted. The analysis of media and secondary sources sets out the importance of the different variables and the congruence of the selected cases. The results that follow out of this analysis lead to the conclusion whether a border conflict can be explained by these variables and if this is applicable to the specific case of Venezuela.

Grounded in the theory on the categorisation of border conflicts, the hypotheses on the typology of Venezuela's border conflicts will be tested within the analysis. This typology is inherently linked to the underlying factors that cause a certain kind of border dispute. Hence, this research also connects certain independent variables with certain dependent

variables. The dependence between the causal factors and the typological outcomes - the conflicts - will be scrutinised. The hypotheses on the type of territorial conflict are as follows:

- *Venezuela - Guyana: a territorial and resource conflict.* The conflict with Guyana concerns the Esequibo area, a territory within Guyana's national borders that has been claimed by Venezuela. This makes this conflict essentially territorial, since the claim is of a greater importance than the actual border separating the Venezuelan and Guyanese territories. Furthermore, it is expected that natural resources are the main characteristic of this dispute.
- *Venezuela - Colombia: a border and migratory conflict.* On the other hand, the border conflict with Colombia takes place at the boundary between the two states as the porosity of this boundary causes a crisis between Colombia and Venezuela. Furthermore, migration seems to be a key feature in these tensions.
- *Venezuela in general: an ideology conflict.* This hypothesis is difficult to examine, but the prevalent Bolivarian ideology within Venezuelan politics suggests an importance of this discourse for the geopolitical course that the country takes. The question is whether Venezuela's territorial disputes stem from political aspirations and thus, are an inherently ideological conflict.

#### 4.5. Conceptual model



**Figure 4.1** Conceptual model, including cases and variables

Source: F.J. Wolters, own design

To visualise this research design, I have included a conceptual model (see figure 4.1). The model is a basic graph, with the chronological scale displayed on the Y-axis and the geographical scale on the X-axis. The analysed conflicts are located on their respective date and location within this framework. The flags represent the countries involved, while the key concepts in the upper right corner represent the independent variables in a simplified way. This model shows that some conflicts might be more applicable to the current situation in Venezuela, since these conflicts are located on a closer position on the time-space spectrum. The Venezuela-Ecuador-Colombia conflict can arguably be separated from Venezuela's current tensions. That is why I have chosen to represent this period separately, as Ecuador's involvement has vanished throughout the conflict that is subject to the case study.

**4.6. Note on research topic**

It is important to take into account that Venezuela finds itself in a time of a profound humanitarian crisis during current president Maduro's reign (Nelson, 2018). This implies that the situation in the country is prone to rapid change. This also includes Venezuela's relationship with its neighbouring countries and thus the object of this research. The discovery of oil in Guyana shows how quick geopolitical equilibriums can be ruptured. Research in international relations is always prone to rapid changes in the field. In this case, one should remember that Venezuela finds itself in a difficult situation and current assumptions and facts may have changed tomorrow.



## 5. CASE STUDIES: VENEZUELA

Following the research design, this chapter sets out the two central case studies. First, the case of a specific border conflict is introduced using a timeline with different stages. Second, the separate variables are described. Third, a system with different scores for each variable adds quantitative value. Last, the outcome of each conflict is typified. The case study on Ecuador and Venezuela against Colombia and Venezuela's current conflict with Colombia are arguably two episodes of a larger conflict.

Although the recent border conflicts of Venezuela take place in the context of the Bolivarian regime, the country has a history with conflicts and tensions before Chávez came into power. Historically, Venezuela has focused on its shared boundary with Colombia. In 1994, tensions increased and eight serious incidents were reported between 1995 and 2003. Military presence has been increasing from 1997 onwards (Anderson, 2003, p. 883). The Venezuelan-Colombian border spans a length of 2,341 km, making it one of the longest common borders in the world (Goumbri, 2008).

Since 1990, Venezuela has been involved in three militarised conflicts, only topped by Nicaragua within Latin America. Guyana and Colombia follow with two conflicts each (Domínguez et al, 2003, p. 5). This demonstrates that the territory of former Gran Colombia still is one of the geopolitically more unstable regions within Latin America. According to Manwaring (2005, p. 15), old territorial quarrels indicate a serious possibility of an inter-state war with Colombia and Guyana.

## I. VENEZUELA - COLOMBIA

**Who: Venezuela, Colombia**

**When: 2008-2017**

**Where: Border passages, city of Cúcuta**

Tensions on the boundary between Colombia and Venezuela have always been intertwined with migration issues. In the past, the countries had problems with the demarcation of their common boundary, which were aggravated by the immigration of Colombian 'aliens' into Venezuela (Braveboy-Wagner, 1984, p. 21). The Colombian border zones are still regarded as among the most lawless areas in Latin America. Drug violence caused more recent flows of Colombian immigration to Venezuela (Briscoe, 2008, pp. 3-4). However, these processes are altering within the context of the border conflict that has unfolded itself over the course of the past years.

The current border tensions between Venezuela and Colombia are part of a longer process of deteriorating relations between both governments, starting in 2008. That was the year that marked the diplomatic crisis between Colombia on the one hand and the axis Venezuela-Ecuador on the other hand. Colombia's army bombed a supposed FARC encampment in Ecuador territory. Venezuelan president Chávez reacted by mobilising the Venezuelan army (Briscoe, 2008, pp. 3-4). Ecuadorian officials reported about Colombian activities on Ecuadorian territory as well as the role of petrol companies in intensifying the conflict. These companies were supported by the Colombian army in encounters with contrabands in Ecuador (Sánchez Giraldo & Calderón Sánchez, 2017, p. 67). Further consequences of this conflict were eventually evaded by diplomatic mediation of UNASUR, the South American regional body (Torres Rodríguez, 2017, pp. 72-73). However, this demonstrates that this early stage of the Venezuelan-Colombian conflict had military as well as economic aspects.

The conflict has aggravated over the last few years, provoked by the deepening of the political and economical crisis in Venezuela. From the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, 2015 onwards, Maduro ordered the closure of parts of the border with Colombia. On 3 October, the complete

boundary was closed. This followed after attacks on Venezuelan soldier by supposed Colombian paramilitaries. Over 22,000 Colombians decided to return to Colombia. Throughout the years, many Colombians had been migrating toward Venezuela, often fleeing violence but never acquiring refugee status. (Clúster de Protección, 2015, pp. 1-5). What soon followed was an exodus of Venezuelan citizens into Colombia and other neighbouring countries. The influx of Venezuelans concentrated itself in the border town of Cúcuta. In 2016, over 150,000 people entered Colombia from Venezuela (Ellis, 2017, pp. 22-23; pp. 26-28). This development adds a specific feature to the border conflict between Venezuela and Colombia. The migration issues imply that topics such as human rights come to play an important role within the framework of the conflict.



**Figure 5.9** Overview map of Venezuela and Colombia

Source: F.J. Wolters, *d-maps, 'República Bolivariana de Venezuela'*

<b>2008, March 1</b>	<b>Colombia bombards FARC camp in Ecuador.</b>	DETERMINING EVENT
<b>2008, March 3</b>	<b>Mobilisation of Ecuadorian and Venezuelan troops. Shutdown of Venezuelan embassy in Bogotá.</b>	CONFLICT
<b>2008, March 11</b>	According to Venezuelan officials, Chávez puts peace in Colombia on the regional agenda, eventually leading to reconciliation between the 'three Andean countries'.	
<b>2008, March 30</b>	The Colombian government obtain files in a cross-border raid in Ecuador and release them. The files link Venezuela's government to financing Colombian insurgencies.	
<b>2010, July 22</b>	<b>Chávez breaks all diplomatic ties with Colombia, after accusations of harbouring Colombian rebels.</b>	RISING TENSIONS
<b>2015, August</b>	<b>Maduro closes large sectors of the border with Colombia. 4,000 Colombians fled Venezuela while 1,088 more were deported.</b>	DETERMINING EVENT
<b>2015, September 18</b>	Three Venezuelan military officers are shot in the state of Táchira, near the Colombian border. Colombian 'smugglers' were to blame according to the Maduro administration.	CONFLICT
<b>2016, October 23</b>	Avianca cancels all flights to and from Venezuela, after a Venezuelan military jet intercepted one of its planes.	
2017, March	Venezuela deploys small military force into Colombian territory	
<b>2018, March 1</b>	<b>The roles have turned. A Venezuelan exodus is taking place. Thousand leave the country every day for Colombia.</b>	

**Figure 5.10** Timeline: Venezuela and Colombia (2008-2018)

Source: F.J. Wolters, own design

**a) Political variable**

The Polity IV index rates Venezuela's regime at -3 in 2010. By 2013, the index assumes the level of autocracy within Venezuela is less, as it has risen to 4. Most interesting is the fact that the score of -3 was the lowest in Venezuela's Polity IV index since 1959, the year of the fall of dictator Pérez Jiménez. The index considers Colombia democratic, at a rate of 7 since 1996. Thus, the regimes differ substantially in level of democracy. The Economist's Democracy Index considers Venezuela authoritarian (3.87) and Colombia a flawed democracy (6.67).

The tensions and conflict between Venezuela and Colombia are connected to the schism between the US-alliance of Colombia and the Bolivarian front. The conflict with Ecuador and Venezuela was the first military manifestation of conflict between these two blocks since the formation of the Bolivarian front. Ecuador and Venezuela were supported by almost all other South American states because of sovereignty violation (Briscoe, 2008, pp. 3-4, p. 8). A plausible solution to the border problems is constrained by ideological factors (Sánchez Giraldo & Calderón Sánchez, 2017, p. 63). As a consequence of diplomatic crisis, neighbouring countries intend to install harder boundary politics, as it is a means to protect the national interest (Torres Rodríguez, 2017, p. 79).

In a speech on 15 February 2018, Maduro expressed his grievances toward Colombia because they are "subordinated to the foreign empire of the United States". He also stated: "no quieren un conflicto [...] con Venezuela" and "respetan a la soberanía de Venezuela" (Telesur, 2018). This demonstrates that Maduro starts to threaten with possible military measures, and uses the Colombia-USA alliance as an explanation.

**b) Economic variable**

The economic factor of the Colombian-Venezuelan conflict is intertwined with crisis, as the streams of migrants and pressure on the common boundary is partly provoked by the collapse of the Venezuelan economy. This economic crisis comprises a declining petroleum output and the inability to even produce basic goods (Ellis, 2017, pp. 22-23). Colombian-Venezuelan trade has been declining over the past decade. In

2018, Venezuela was the second export destination for Colombian products (Trading Economics, 2018).

**c) *Military-strategic variable***

Colombia regards its border with Venezuela as its most “dynamic” border. Furthermore, Colombia is well aware that the current border crisis threatens the geopolitical stability in the entire region (Sánchez Giraldo & Calderón Sánchez, 2017, pp. 56-57, p. 64). Maduro's measures regarding Colombia - such as closing border passages - are exemplary for the defence of Venezuelan sovereignty. This securitization is in part caused by the feeling of threat from the outside. According to Torres Rodríguez (2017, pp. 73-74), Venezuela perceives the border zones as constant threats. Venezuela's strategy toward the Colombian border is a “classical strategy” of defence of the territory of a state.

**d) *Historic-geographical variable***

Venezuelan-Colombian grievances over territory are nothing new. After the collapse of Gran Colombia, the newly formed states needed to define their common boundary. After Venezuela's refusal to ratify a common treaty, the case was taken to the Spanish King for arbitration in 1881. However, only after Swiss arbitration, a boundary was demarcated in 1924, almost a century after the independence of both states. (Prescott & Triggs, 2016, 254-256). These demarcation problems are typical for Latin America, as they stem from uncertain borders within the former Spanish Empire. (Scott, 1922, pp. 428-431). Although the current boundary problems focus on migration, the geopolitical issues should not be forgotten. Venezuela still assesses territorial claims over the La Guajira department through Article 10 in its 1999 Constitution (Ellis, 2017, p. 29; Constitución de Venezuela, art. 10, 1999). Demographically, the border area between Colombia and Venezuela is most populous (Sánchez Giraldo & Calderón Sánchez, 2017; see appendix IV).

**e) *Crisis variable***

As indicated before, Venezuela is going through a deep economic and political crisis. The migratory issues in the border worsen Colombian-Venezuelan relations. The wider South American region is characterised by deteriorating democracies and strengthening nationalism and ideas of sovereignty (Sánchez Giraldo & Calderón

Sánchez, 2017, pp. 56-57). Venezuela's internal situation generates instability around the geopolitical border with Colombia (ibid, p. 54).

Political conformity					X	Political divergence
Economic ties and trade			X			Economic isolation
No strategic interest			X			Great strategic interest
No historical precedents				X		Historical and geographic precedents
Absence of crisis					X	Presence of crisis

**Table 5.5** Variable scores, Venezuela and Colombia

Source: F.J. Wolters

The conflict between Venezuela and Colombia is very complex. However, it is clear that this conflict is not new, but rather a continuation of older discrepancies. The importance of the political factor becomes clear in this border conflict, where two opposite regime types share a common boundary. The conflict is however especially aggravated by the - migration - crisis element.

**Typology: Border and ideological conflict, migratory conflict**

## II. VENEZUELA - GUYANA

**Who: Venezuela, Guyana**

**When: 2015-2017**

**Where: Essequibo zone**

As is the case with other border disputes in South America, the current tensions between Venezuela and Guyana represent a new episode in longstanding tensions that have their roots in colonial times. The tensions can be dated back to the British incorporation of Guyana. The territory in question is Essequibo area, known as 'Guayana Essequiba' to the Venezuelans (Braveboy-Wagner, 1984, p. 65). Although the conflict seemed to be settled in 1899, the Venezuelans revived their claim in 1962 (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, pp. 249-251; Braveboy-Wagner, p. 25). Their argument was favouritism toward imperial Britain (Neuman, 2015). Apart from being one of the largest territorial claims in the western hemisphere, the conflict represents a cleavage between the Latin world and the non-Latin world. In 1966, the year that Guyana became independent from Great Britain, both countries signed the Geneva Agreement (Braveboy-Wagner, pp. 36-37; p. 327). According to Monzón et al (2016, p. 229) this proves the Guyanese recognition of Venezuela's standing claim. The dispute has lingered on ever since.

Against this background, the conflict has entered a new stage in recent years. In May 2015, Exxon Mobile, working for the Guyanese government, announced the discovery of large oil reserves in the disputed territory. Venezuela's firm response could even imply a possible military clash (Neuman, 2015). In an interview, president Maduro declared that the Essequibo "siempre fue nuestra" and that Guyanese activities were part of "una campaña brutal contra Venezuela" (Maduro, 2015, July 8). Venezuelan journalist Román (2018, March 3) declared the fear of "losing Guayana Essequiba". Furthermore, a NGO was founded, called *Mi Mapa de Venezuela incluye nuestro Essequibo*. Guyana has the uncomfortable position of a small state with a territorial conflict with a larger and more powerful neighbour (Mares, 2001, p. 75). Although all this has not erupted into a physical conflict yet, the language and



diplomatic moves of both sides indicate a traditional territorial conflict with extensive consequences.



**Figure 5.7** Esequibo claim in Guyana  
Source: New York Times, 2015

2015, February 20	Guyana announces exploration of petrol resources	DETERMINING EVENT
2015, March 3	Venezuela accuses Guyanese of unjust behaviour	RISING TENSIONS
<b>2015, July 6</b>	<b>Venezuela withdraws its ambassador from Georgetown.</b>	
2015, July 8	Interview with Maduro: "¡El Esequibo es Venezolano!"	
2015, July 9	Venezuela stops rice-oil trade with Guyana.	CONFLICT
2015, Summer	Venezuela concentrates troops along the boundary	
2015, September 27	Venezuela and Guyana restore their ambassadors, despite the continuing border dispute.	
2015, November 19	Venezuela's claim on the territory west of the Esequibo river leads to a more heated dispute, after Exxon Mobil discovered large oil reserves off the coast of the contested territory. These months represent one of the angriest phases of the dispute, after Maduro had already blocked the main border crossing with other neighbour Colombia.	
2016, December 30	The Guyanese government gives green light to construct a \$500M oil and gas facility on Crab Island.	
2017, January 14	Exxon Mobile and Hess announce the successful drilling of deepwater exploration. This will probably mean one of the richest oil discoveries in decades. Guyana could become the next big oil producer in the Western Hemisphere.	

**Figure 5.8** Timeline: Venezuela and Guyana (2015-2017)

Source: F.J. Wolters, own design

#### a) *Political variable*

According to the Polity IV Index, Venezuela had an autocratic level of -3 from 2010 onwards. Guyana is more democratic with a score of 6. The Economist's *Democracy Index* values Venezuela as an autocracy (3.87), while it was a hybrid regime in 2008 (5.18). Guyana is called a flawed democracy (6.46) from 2006 onwards.

Both countries have a socialist regime, as Guyana's constitution mentions socialism as a key pillar (Chung, 1980). In his interview, Maduro called Guyana 'nuestra hermana república de Guyana'. Logically, Monzón et al (2016, p. 241) ask what has happened to the solidarity between two socialist states. In 2004, Chávez did not object Guyana giving out concessions in the Essequibo, to gain support among Caribbean states (ibid, p. 227). However, since then, the Venezuelan-Guyanese relations have reached a new low. In a recent governmental communiqué, released on January 31, 2018, Maduro concluded with the words: "El sol de Venezuela nace en el Esequibo". A political tool is the publication of maps that represent the Essequibo as Venezuelan territory (Franco, 2016, p. 505). Guyana is weaker politically, economically, militarily and physically smaller (Braveboy-Wagner, 1984, p. 73). This uneven power balance in combination with the current crisis implies that Maduro regards the Guyanese front as a possibility of victory.

**b) Economic variable**

The conflict over the Essequibo area gained a new dimension when new oil fields were discovered after Guyana gave concessions to Exxon Mobile. This is in line with Braveboy-Wagner's statement that "the greater its economic importance, the more the claim to the territory is pushed" (1984, p. 9). In 1970, the Venezuelan government had already issued a straight baseline for its maritime claims. However, this baseline extended 44 kilometres into Guyanese territory (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, p. 251). The Venezuelan government declared that it did not allow Guyana to access natural resources or giving out concessions in *Venezuela's sovereign territory*, e.g. the Essequibo (The Geographer, 1970). The economic stakes in Essequibo are high, as it is rich in mineral resources and hydroelectric potential. Guyana's future economic development lies within the Essequibo region (Braveboy-Wagner, 1984, pp. 77-80).

**c) Military-strategic variable**

Although the area seems of higher economic than strategic value, there are some notes on the military that one has to keep in mind. There is a large military disparity between the countries (Appendix IV; Monzón et al, 2016, p. 192). Although Britain was regarded as the imperial power by Venezuela, Monzón et al argue that now, "nosotros somos el imperio" (p. 192).

In strategic terms, the size of the claim plays a role. As Braveboy-Wagner (1984, pp. 1-2) notes, “territory is to be seen [...] as one of the elements of a nation’s power”. Furthermore, the coastal area is considered as Venezuela’s gateway to the Atlantic (Pérez, 2018). However, a real war is not likely as war as a means of territorial conquest has lost its legitimacy (Braveboy-Wagner, p. 5). This is in line with the opinion of the Venezuelan authors Monzón et al (p. 200), who state that no Venezuelan considers launching a conquest of the whole Essequibo region.

**d) Historic-geographical variable**

This is probably still the key factor in the conflict. Monzón et al (2016, p. 9) contend: “La soberanía de Venezuela sobre el territorio Essequibo se fundamenta en hechos históricos y geográficos”. Before 1899, the British and Venezuelan claims overlapped each other. The British claim had extended to the Orinoco River in the Venezuelan state of Bolívar. The Venezuelan claim covered all the territory west to the Essequibo River (The Geographer, 1963, pp. 2). In 1897, Venezuela and the UK decided to take the case to arbitration consisting of two British judges and two American judges and a Russian councillor (Prescott & Triggs, 2008, pp. 249-251). The 1899 treaty awarded the largest portion to the British, whose successor was the independent Guyana (Franco, 2016, pp. 504-505).

Geographically, the border area is located in thick and inaccessible rainforest (The Geographer, 1963, p. 2). The Essequibo region is sparsely populated (see appendix IV).

**e) Crisis variable**

The conflict has entered one of its most intense phases, correlating with a deepening economic and political crisis in Venezuela (Neuman, 2015; CIA, 2018; Kahn & Tananbaum, 2016). According to Venezuelan sources, Venezuelan citizens cross the border with Guyana in search of medicines and alimentation (Román, 2018).

Political conformity		X			Political divergence
Economic ties and trade			X		Economic isolation
No strategic interest		X			Great strategic interest
No historical precedents				X	Historical and geographic precedents
Absence of crisis				X	Presence of crisis

**Table 5.4** Variable scores, Venezuela and Guyana

Source: F.J. Wolters

The conflict is characterised by economic and historical factors. Furthermore, there is a clear presence of crisis on the Venezuelan side and a disparity between the two disputing states. Although the two states have socialist regimes, the level of democracy differs. Furthermore, the intensification of the territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana can be regarded as a “diversionary tactic” of the Venezuelan regime (Ellis, 2017, p. 29).

**Typology: Territorial and resource conflict**

## 6. CASE STUDIES: SOUTH AMERICA

This chapter sets out three comparative case studies in other parts of South America in order to test the Venezuelan border conflicts in the wider context of Latin America. The case studies have the same set-up as the two Venezuela case studies.

### III. ACCESS TO THE OCEAN

**Who: Chile, Bolivia and Peru**

**When: March 1974 - 1978**

**Where: Northern Atacama Desert**

Chile and Bolivia have had a strained bilateral relationship throughout history (Quitral Rojas, 2010, pp. 140-141). After its victory in the War of the Pacific in 1881, Chile incorporated the province of Antofagasta into its territory, thus cutting Bolivia's access to the Pacific (Silva Bustos, 2014, p. 2). Bolivia lost its 400 km coastal region and has tried to regain its maritime access ever since (BBC News, 2017). However, the tense border politics between the states seemed to alleviate during the mid seventies (Quitral Rojas, p. 141). As part of a reconciliation of the Chilean-Bolivian relations - that had been broken in 1962 - Chile was willing to offer a corridor north of Arica adjacent to the Peruvian border. In return, Bolivia had to cede the same amount of territory in the Uyuni region to Chile (Silva Bustos, pp. 11-12). However, Peruvian consent was needed. Santiago did not agree with Lima's proposed alterations to the original plan (Diario La Tercera, 2002). Eventually, this promising border conflict solution ended in Bolivia breaking all diplomatic ties with Chile in 1978.

		CONFLICT
1973, September 11	Pinochet takes power in Chile. Bolivian Banzer is first to support the coup.	DETERMINING EVENT
1974, March	Pinochet and Banzer meet in Brasilia. Talks about reconciliation.	PRE-CONFLICT
1974, December 9	Declaration of Ayacucho, stressing the importance of Bolivia's <i>mediterraneidad</i> .	
<b>1975, February 8</b>	<b><i>Abrazo de Charaña, with Chile offering a coastal corridor to Bolivia.</i></b>	DETERMINING EVENT
1975, November	Peru proposes alterations. Disagreement with Chile.	RISING TENSIONS
<b>1978</b>	<b>Bolivia definitively breaks diplomatic ties with Chile.</b>	CONFLICT

**Figure 5.1** Timeline: Chile, Bolivia and Peru (1973-1978)

Source: F.J. Wolters, own design



**Figure 5.2** Concerned border area between Peru, Bolivia and Chile

Source: F.J. Wolters; OpenStreetMap, 2018

**a) Political variable**

Both the regime in Chile and in Bolivia can be typified as totalitarian military dictatorships (Quitral Rojas, 2010). In 1975, both Chile and Bolivia as well as Peru score -7 at the Polity IV index, indicating a high level of autocracy. Regimes with likeminded ideologies seek conflict prevention. Furthermore, Banzer and Pinochet were driven toward each other by the Soviet rapprochement of Peru (González Miranda & Ovando Santana, 2015, p. 22).

**b) Economic variable**

The economic value of the concerned region cannot be underestimated as a port at the ocean is of vital economic importance to Bolivia's economy, as well as the presence of large reserves of guano saltpetre (Wisniak & Garcés, 2001, p. 431). Economic factors were in favour of conflict resolution as Chile and Bolivia improved their bilateral trade forced by private economic actors (Quitral Rojas, pp. 158-159).

**c) Military-strategic variable**

The sea access is of vital strategic importance to Bolivia, still maintaining its navy despite being a land-locked country (Köckritz, 2012). The military diplomacy of Pinochet and Banzer enabled the short rapprochement between the two states (Quitral Rojas, p. 140).

**d) Historic-geographical variable**



The current border between Chile, Bolivia and Peru is a result of Chile's victory in the War of the Pacific in 1881. The border tensions in the region increased because Peru had to be consulted, since this was part of the Treaty of Friendship of 1929 (Quitral Rojas, p. 149).

**e) Crisis variable**

Chile found itself in a deepened diplomatic crisis as the Pinochet regime was diplomatically isolated and sought allies in the region.

Political conformity	X					Political divergence
Economic ties and trade		X				Economic isolation
No strategic interest					X	Great strategic interest
No historical precedents					X	Historical and geographic precedents
Absence of crisis				X		Presence of crisis

**Table 5.1** Variable scores, Chile, Bolivia and Peru

Source: F.J. Wolters, OpenStreetMap, 2018

Although the favourable economic and political factors initially seemed to lead to a reconciliation between Chile and Bolivia, other factors eventually caused increased border tensions.

**Typology: Territorial conflict, resource conflict, ideological conflict**

#### IV. THE BEAGLE ISLANDS

**Who: Argentina, Chile**

**When: 1976-1984**

**Where: Eastern Beagle Channel**

The highest peaks of the Andes formed the guideline for the Spanish to draw the north-south boundary between Argentina and Chile. However, the southernmost tip of the continent did not comply with this longitudinal system (Princen, 2014, pp. 133-134). The territory of southern Tierra del Fuego and the surrounding islands had been demarcated as neutral territory (Franco, 2016, p. 503). As the countries disputed the area, an agreement was drafted in 1881, known as the Boundary Treaty. Although the treaty provides precise descriptions and settled most disputes, three islands in the Beagle Channel go unmentioned, causing border conflicts over the course of the twentieth century (UN, 1977, pp. 81-86; Princen, p. 134). The Argentine and Chilean republics contend that the Picton, Nueva and Lennox Islands are rightfully theirs and in 1971, they decide to take the maritime territorial case to international arbitration (UN, pp. 77-79). However, when the court issued the *Laudo* - handing the islands to Chile and navigational rights to Argentina - Argentina did not agree. Without any solution at hand, both countries started to prepare for war in November 1978, mobilising their armies. Eventually, the conflict was settled by mediation of the Vatican in 1984 (Princen, pp. 156-161).



**Figure 5.3** Concerned islands in the Eastern Beagle Channel

Source: F.J. Wolters; OpenStreetMap, 2018

1881	Boundary Treaty	PRE-CONFLICT
1971, July 22	Agreement for Arbitration	
1976, March 26	Videla takes power in Argentina.	DETERMINING EVENT
<b>1976, May 2</b>	<b><i>Laudo</i> issued</b>	RISING TENSIONS
1978, January 19	Fruitless meeting between Videla and Pinochet	
<b>1978, January 25</b>	<b>Argentine Foreign Minister declares negation of <i>Laudo</i></b>	CONFLICT
<b>1978, November</b>	<b>Mobilisation of forces toward the borders</b>	
1978, December 22	Set date Argentine invasion	
1979, January 8	Troops withdrew	
1984, November 29	Argument is settled	

**Figure 5.4** Timeline: Argentina and Chile (1971-1984)

Source: F.J. Wolters, own design

**a) Political variable**

In 1976, Chile scored a -7 on the Polity IV index. Argentina had just fallen from 6 to -9, indicating a sudden shift from a stable democracy to an extreme autocracy. The new nationalist rhetoric resonated in the words of navy commander Massera regarding the Beagle conflict: “our homeland cannot be amputated,” (Princen, 2014, p. 136).

**b) Economic variable**

Today, Argentina and Chile are important trade partners. Argentina originally even wanted to ship products toward the Pacific from Chilean ports. Economic integration had been discussed before (ibid, p. 134). With war looming, Argentina took economic measures against Chile, such as impeding shipments and implementing higher price tariffs, hence trying to force them to cede islands to Argentina (ibid, pp. 136-137).

**c) Military-strategic variable**

The military-strategic value of the conflict was high as it concerned Chilean access to the Atlantic. Argentine minister Osiris Villegas stated that “national interests and

sovereignty [come] before peace" (Princen, pp. 134-135). As Argentina had become a military dictatorship under Jorge Videla, the military-strategic situation had changed. His views were *bioceanic*: Argentina as an Atlantic nation and Chile as a Pacific nation. However, the strategic position of the islands opened the Atlantic to the Chileans (see figure 5.3). The Chileans could also use possessions in the Beagle Channel to strengthen its claim on Antarctica (Braveboy-Wagner, 1984, p. 19). The conflict was thus largely motivated by strategic motives. Furthermore, Chile's political isolation implied that arms were sold to Argentina but not to Chile (ibid, pp. 156-157)

**d) Historic-geographical variable**

The Spanish colonial legacy caused initial disputes between Argentina and Chile. The 1881 Boundary Treaty did not settle the boundary demarcation at its fullest (UN, 1977, p. 81-86).

**e) Crisis variable**

Chile found itself in a diplomatic isolation and other border issues with Bolivia. Argentina was involved the Falkland crisis. Although the Chileans feared an Argentine invasion just like on the *Malvinas*, the debacle in that war arguably contributed to Argentina's willingness to settle the conflict eventually (Princen, pp. 156-161).

Political conformity		X				Political divergence
Economic ties and trade			X			Economic isolation
No strategic interest					X	Great strategic interest
No historical precedents					X	Historical and geographic precedents
Absence of crisis					X	Presence of crisis

**Table 5.2** Variable scores, Chile, Bolivia and Peru

Source: F.J. Wolters

This case study shows that the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile respectively have driven the countries against each other both adopting nationalist narratives. The countries took up the arms for a conflict over three uninhabited islands on a strategic position. The crises in both countries probably triggered the escalation of the conflict, but also meant that they did not have the means to afford real conflict.

**Typology: Territorial conflict *with strategic motives***

## V. WAR IN THE ANDES

**Who: Ecuador, Peru**

**When: 1995**

**Where: Cordillera del Cóndor, Cenepa Valley**

The most recent inter-state war in South America took place between Ecuador and Peru in 1995 (Domínguez et al, 2003, p. 9). The conflict was mainly fought through the air, since high peaks and vast jungle isolate the contested area - the Cenepa Valley. There are no paved roads within 300 kilometres (Cooper, 2003, pp. 8-9). The countries had already collided in 1941 and 1981. In 1941, a peace treaty was brokered, delineating the boundary over the peaks of the Cordillera del Cóndor. However, Ecuador did not agree to this border interpretation, thus leaving the conflict open (ibid, p. 1). Because of historic reasons, Ecuador still held a claim of 181,300 km<sup>2</sup> over Peruvian territory. Ecuador has aspirations to become an Amazonian state and the incorporation of the Cenepa River would give access to the Amazon river (Elbow, 1996, pp. 95-97; Parodi, 2002, pp. 78-80). Ecuadorian politicians refer to Peru as the 'enemy' that 'dismembered' Ecuador (Parodi, p. 78). In January 1995, the tensions erupted in an armed conflict that lasted for about a month. On February 13, Peruvian president Fujimori declared victory and a unilateral ceasefire, ending the war for the time being (New York Times, 1995, February 14).



**Figure 5.5** Contested area between Ecuador and Peru

Source: F.J. Wolters; OpenStreetMap, 2018

		PRE-CONFLICT
<b>1942, January 29</b>	<b>Rio Protocol, intended to settle disputes, assigns Cenepa river to Peru</b>	DETERMINING EVENT
1995	Ecuador concentrates forces in Cenepa Valley	RISING TENSIONS
1995, January 9	Peruvian patrol disarmed by Ecuadorians	
1995, January 11	First fire fight	CONFLICT
<b>1995, January 26</b>	<b>Ecuadorians conquer Tiwintza (Peru)</b>	
1995, January 29	Peruvians attack the front line	
1995, February 9	Negotiations fail, fiercest fighting	
<b>1995, February 13</b>	<b>Ceasefire after Fujimori declares victory</b>	

**Figure 5.6** Timeline: Ecuador and Peru (1995)

Source: F.J. Wolters, own design

**a) Political variable**

In 1995, the Polity IV index awarded Peru a score of 1, after a recent fall in democracy. Ecuador scored a 9, thus being considerably more democratic than Peru. Although Fujimori and his counterpart Durán both represented a right neoliberal political view, their levels of democracy diverged. Fujimori hardened his position on Ecuador because of his re-election campaign in 1994 (Elbow, 1996, p. 97). This probably contributed to the escalation of the conflict.

**b) Economic variable**

The territory claimed by Ecuador has important oil reserves and other resources. Iquitos, Peru's most important port at the Rio Amazonas, is also located in the area, as well as the economic importance of access to the river. During 1994 and 1995, Ecuador faced a grave economic situation, which lowered initial hopes on an improved relationship with Peru (Elbow, 1996, p. 97). The conflict caused economic problems as bilateral trade suffered and the border areas were left underdeveloped (ibid, p. 93).

**c) Military-strategic variable**

Peru used to have one of the most modern and best-equipped air forces in South America. However, the economic damage of the 1988 crisis meant that the Peruvian military was in a bad condition (Cooper, 2003, pp. 1-5). The Ecuadorian air force was one of the most capable in South America and in a better condition by 1995 (ibid, p. 7). The area is not of a specific strategic value.

**d) Historic-geographical variable**

Both countries have their own narratives of discovery of the Amazon River. Both still celebrate the discovery on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February. The limit of the conflicted territory is the so-called Mosquera-Pedemonte, agreed between Peru and Gran Colombia in 1829. Because of the chaotic disintegration of Gran Colombia a year later, this was never implemented (Elbow, 1996, p. 96). The contemporary boundary stretches through the Cordillera del Cóndor, but the Ecuadorians want the Cenepa River to be the separation line. Hence, the conflict has a strong historic-geographical value (Parodi, 2002, p. 92).

**e) Crisis variable**

By 1988, the Peruvian economy had considerable troubles with an inflation rate over 2000%. The economic crisis worsened relations (Cooper, 2003, p. 4).

Political conformity				X		Political divergence
Economic ties and trade			X			Economic isolation
No strategic interest		X				Great strategic interest
No historical precedents					X	Historical and geographic precedents
Absence of crisis					X	Presence of crisis

**Table 5.3** Variable scores, Peru and Ecuador

Source: F.J. Wolters

Geographical factors played a major role in this conflict as the Cenepa River was discovered by North American airplanes in 1941. The different political views on each other also contributed to the eruption of a longstanding historical tension.

**Typology: Territorial conflict, resource conflict**

## 7. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1. Limitations and strengths

Although this thesis adds to our understanding of border conflicts in South America and beyond, it had some limitations and leaves room for further research. The research method in this study is inherently qualitative, which makes it hard to come up with 'strong conclusions' or recommendations. Although I translated the qualitative research into variable scores and used indices for the political factors, one has to keep in mind that this data involves some degree of subjective judgement. The tables served as a means for comparison between the variables and between the case studies in order to draw conclusions on the relative importance of certain factors within the emergence of border conflicts.

Furthermore, this research highlighted five case studies set at different times and locations. This implies that the study is valuable for South America and Venezuela. However, a more extensive study on Venezuela itself could add more detail to its particular situation. Venezuela finds itself in a special situation as it is the archetypal Bolivarian revolution. This research proved that the shift toward more autocracy in Venezuela coincides with a stronger geopolitical rhetoric and a rise in border conflicts. Although it is clear that the autocratic facets of the Bolivarian regimes influence border conflicts, the question that deserves more research is the influence of specific characteristics of Bolivarianism. Further research could compare different South American dictatorships - such as Bolivarianism and Pinochet's regime - with each other in relation with territorial issues. The findings of this study could also be expanded to include more cases, geographically or temporally, for example Central America or the nineteenth century.

A strength of this thesis is the use of maps, as they visualise the geographical factor of border studies (Franco, 2016). The historical part was visualised by the timelines, hence clarifying the case studies. Venezuela's crisis is rapidly developing. This implies that changes



at the borders take place as well. The problems that rise in Venezuela need future research in order to contribute to the knowledge on the effects of crises, as well as the specific aspects of the Bolivarian administrations.

## 7.2. Variables

In the past chapters, the case studies of border conflicts set at different times within the geographical scope of South America turned out to bear diverging typologies as well as different contexts. This analysis intends to come closer to an answer on the research question and apply the findings of the comparative case studies to Venezuela, as well as setting Venezuela's position in the South American context. Table 6.1 gives an overview of the relative importance of the factors for the analysed border conflicts.

Level of importance	VEN, GUY	VEN, COL	CHL, BOL, PER	CHL, ARG	ECU, PER
Political	0	+2	-2	-1	+1
Economic	+1	0	-1	0	0
Strategic	0	0	+2	+2	-1
Historical	+2	+1	+2	+2	+2
Crisis	+2	+2	+1	+2	+2

**Table 6.1** The relative importance of the different factors on the eventual conflict outcome

Source: F.J. Wolters

It is important to note that all analysed conflicts, although the research covers a set time period, still linger on today in the shape of tensions, as the historical aspect of these border conflicts is part of the South American conscience (Braveboy-Wagner, 1984, pp. 18-19). Table 6.1 demonstrates this, as all analysed border conflicts had **strong historical as well as geographical precedents**. This variable is not connected to a specific type of conflict.

The first variable however, the importance of **political factors**, did not turn out as important as expected. Only in the Venezuelan-Colombian case there seems to be a strong connection with politics, as the respective regimes represent different ideological blocks. One can see that certain regimes - such as in the case of Chile and Bolivia - even were surprisingly close to each other. The political will to prevent a border conflict might have been present, but nonetheless a conflict emerged. Other political factors still play a role, most notably political stability. An unstable state has "to 'prove' its sovereignty at an international stage". Political divergence logically coincides with *ideological conflicts*.

**Economic factors** are generally not the key variable in these case studies. However, their influence over conflicts should not be understated. Instead of the influence of economy and trade, it is *the absence* of significant bilateral trade that influences a conflict. This absence facilitates the emergence of conflict without the risk of economic repercussions, as one can see in the Venezuela-Guyana conflict. Economic factors are linked with *resource* as well as *territorial conflicts*.

The **strategic-military variable** turned out to be ambiguous. Conflicts with a long history heighten the influence of this variable. The importance of this factor cannot be underestimated, as it often comes in the disguise of another factor, like in the case of Guyana. As this study is inherently geopolitical, strategic values are important, but not as important as one might suspect. Strategic factors coincide with *territorial conflicts*.

Finally, these case studies demonstrated that the **presence of some kind of crisis** has a decisive effect on the emergence of territorial conflicts. All of these conflicts were preceded by some kind of crisis, political, economical, diplomatic, or a combination of these. Venezuela's internal crisis seems to externalise itself toward its frontiers. Just like Chile found itself in a situation of diplomatic isolation during the dictatorship of Pinochet, and Peru was affected by deep economic crisis before the armed conflict with Ecuador. All types of border conflict have been preceded by crisis.

### 7.3. Venezuela

Geopolitically speaking, the Venezuelan stakes within the border conflicts with Colombia and Guyana are high. This is especially the case for the Essequibo conflict with Guyana. Braveboy-Wagner (1984, p. 93) contends that there exist two possible outcomes. A Venezuelan success on the Guyana front could induce an increased pressure on Colombia, since Venezuela would be territorially and economically more powerful, and have Guyana as a precedent. The second possible outcome is a relaxation in the Colombian-Venezuelan tensions, since Venezuela will have gained its desired territory and geo-strategic sources.

This is in line with the conflict typology that I gave in the case studies. The fact that natural resources and crude territory are involved, makes the Guyana conflict more tangible, different from the more social and humanitarian conflict with Colombia. The findings from this research are in line with Mares' (2001) claim that the conflicts on Venezuela's eastern and western border are inherently different as one of them is a territorial claim, while the other is related to border problems. This is strengthened by the fact that the sources that I used for the Venezuela-Guyana case study are mainly geographical and economical. The sources for the Venezuela-Colombia cases are often linked to human rights.

The conflict between Venezuela and Colombia is characterised by altering migration, as well as diverging levels of democracy and an aggressive rhetoric from Venezuelan president Maduro. Contrasting, political factors do not play an important role in the Venezuelan-Guyanese conflict. For the Bolivarian presidents, the claim on the Essequibo is rather a tool to influence the public opinion than an actual dispute between two opposing governments. Economic interests and a geopolitical notion are underlying reasons for the existence of this conflict, which can be dated back to the nineteenth century. These observations lead to the conclusion that the ideology conflict hypothesis applies to the Venezuela-Colombia conflict, but not necessarily to the Venezuela-Guyana conflict.

Apart from the fact that an increasing level of autocracy and a rise in border conflicts coincide, this research demonstrates the strong link between an internal crisis and deepening border conflicts. The 'externalising' thesis is not only the case in contemporary Venezuela, but turned out to exist in the South American test cases as well.

#### 7.4. South America

In order to test the Venezuelan cases within the context of South America, three other case studies were included. Despite the differences in time and location between Venezuela and the other cases, the research demonstrated trends that they are typical for border conflicts in South America, including Venezuela. The most important factors - the presence of crisis and the existence of historic-geographic precedents - are crucial in all five case studies. In that sense Venezuela is not different from other conflicts throughout South America. On the one hand, this implies that Venezuela can be seen as an example of a typical South American border conflict. On the other hand, it demonstrates that data and factors that have been found for Venezuela can be applied to other South American territorial conflicts in the future and the past. However, this conclusion should not nullify the particular context of Venezuela when the territorial border conflicts developed. The 'clash' between two ideologies as is the case with Colombia, as well as the geopolitical rhetoric regarding a significant territorial claim in a neighbouring country as happens with Guyana, are both relatively new developments and deserve more extensive research.

#### 7.5. Conclusions

Venezuela's border conflicts signify a new episode in the geopolitical history of South America, a continent that experienced diverging territorial disputes in its recent history. This study demonstrated the complex links between international relations, geography, history, economy and strategy that underlie the existence of border conflicts. Most importantly, the research proved the influence of internal crises on the rise of territorial disputes between two or more nation-states.

In the introduction to this thesis, I stated the following research question:

***“What are the causes of Venezuela's territorial border disputes with Colombia and Guyana that emerged from 2015 onwards?”***

It is clear that a single statement cannot answer this question. However, the importance of historical-geographical precedents in combination with a political-economical crisis is a strong incentive for border conflicts in South America in general and Venezuela

more specifically. The focus of this research was Venezuela, but the test cases demonstrated that causal relationships could be applied to the wider scope of South America.

The influence of crisis - or political instability - on the emergence of territorial disputes became clear throughout the case studies. This supports the hypothesis of a reverse systemic uncertainty model. Internal crises can cause a rise in territorial conflicts, thus externalising domestic troubles.

This thesis revealed the relative importance and connections between the causes behind a border conflict, instead of focusing on the consequences of border conflicts. In the introduction, I stated that the research seeks to contribute “on the relationship between external boundary disputes and the internal political-historical situation”. The hypothesis on internal crisis supported this objective. If a country has an instable political situation or an internal crisis, this explains the existence of border conflicts, while historical precedents are the second essential factor regarding the emergence of border conflicts between South American states.

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## **APPENDICES**

## I. POLITY IV

### Explanatory Notes

**Polity IV Trend Graph, 1946-2010:** The *Polity IV Country Reports* contain a graphic in the upper right hand corner that tracks the country's annual Polity scores from 1946 to present with a referent grid denoting vertical thresholds for Democracy (+6 and above) and Autocracy (-6 and below) and a horizontal line indicating the end of the Cold War (1991). The trend graph includes information on **special Polity conditions**, including periods of **factionalism** (POLCOMP = 6 or 7; Polity trend line denoted in RED), **interruption** (POLITY = -66; Polity trend denoted with dashed purple line), **interregnum** (POLITY = -77; Polity trend denoted with dashed black line), and **transition** (POLITY = -88; Polity trend denoted with dashed green line) and **special Polity change events**, including **autocratic backsliding** (i.e., a five-point or greater change toward more autocratic authority that forcibly replaces an established regime, denoted with an X), **executive auto-coups or autogolpe** (i.e., a five-point or greater change in regime authority initiated by a ruling executive, denoted by an A), **revolutionary change** (i.e., a forcible ouster of an established regime and its wholesale replacement by a radically different regime authority and ruling elite, denoted by an R), **state failure** (i.e., the total or near-total collapse of central authority affecting more than fifty percent of state territory, denoted by a S), and **coup d'etat** (i.e., a military or military-backed forcible ouster of an established executive with little or no change in regime authority).

#### Polity IV Trend Graph Summary:

Regime POLITY scores are generally plotted over time using a **SOLID BLUE LINE** (note that the Polity scores are plotted for January 1 of the target year rather than December 31 as they are recorded in the Polity IV data series; e.g., the value recorded for a regime on December 31, 2005 is plotted for the year 2006 on the graph). As our research shows that periods of "factionalism" are particularly problematic for the durability of established regime authority patterns, we plot these special periods of "factionalism" with a **SOLID RED LINE**.

#### Special Polity IV regime conditions are denoted by dashed lines:

**PURPLE DASHED LINE** denotes an "Interruption (-66)"

**BLACK DASHED LINE** denotes an "Interregnum (-77)"

**GREEN DASHED LINE** denotes a "Transition (-88)"

**Special Polity IV change events are marked with capital letters at the (initial) point of change in the Polity Trend Graph:**

**Autocratic Backsliding Events** are denoted by a BOLD BLACK "X"

**Executive Auto-coup or *autogolpe* Events** are denoted by a BOLD BLACK "A"

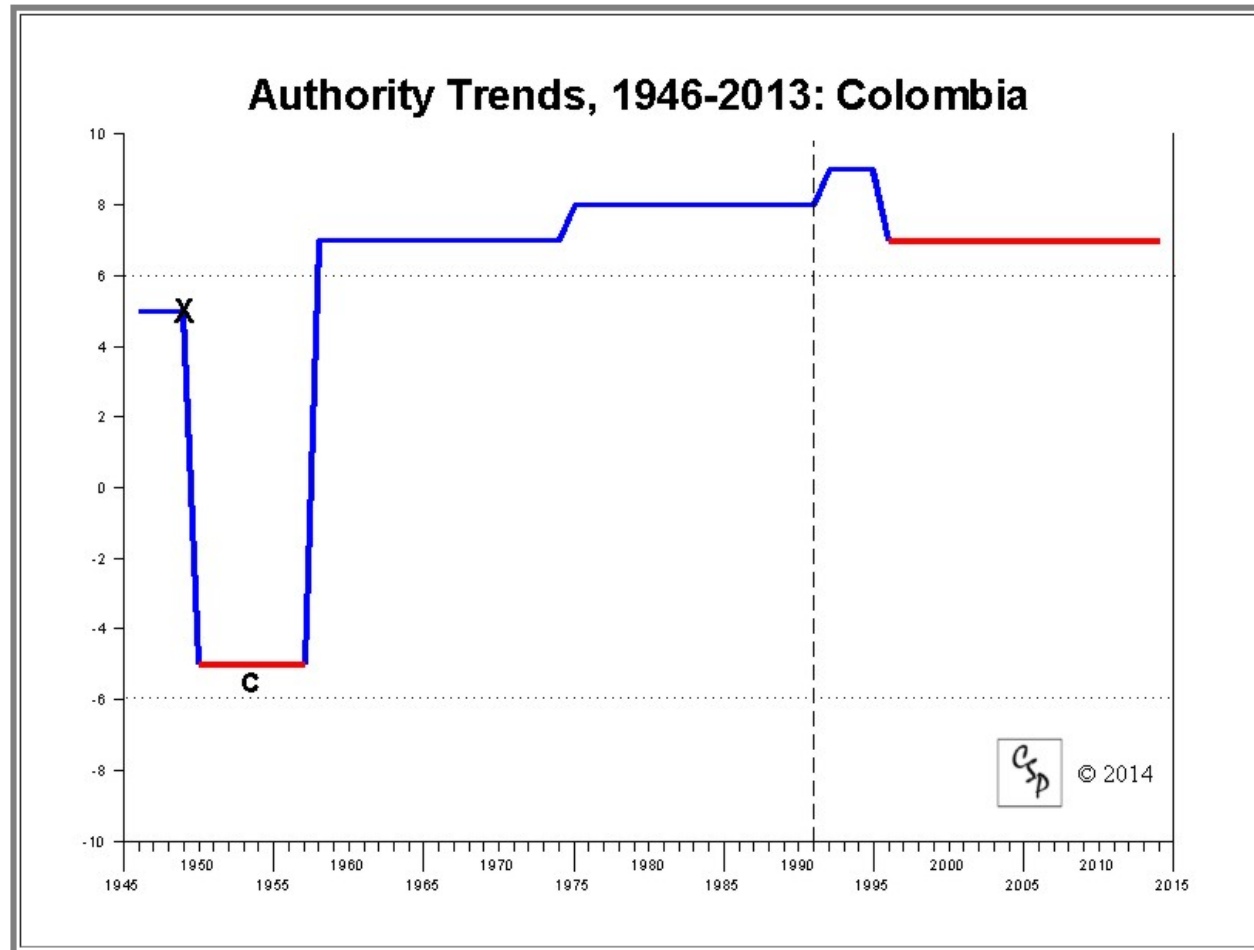
**Revolutionary Change Events** are denoted by a BOLD BLACK "R"

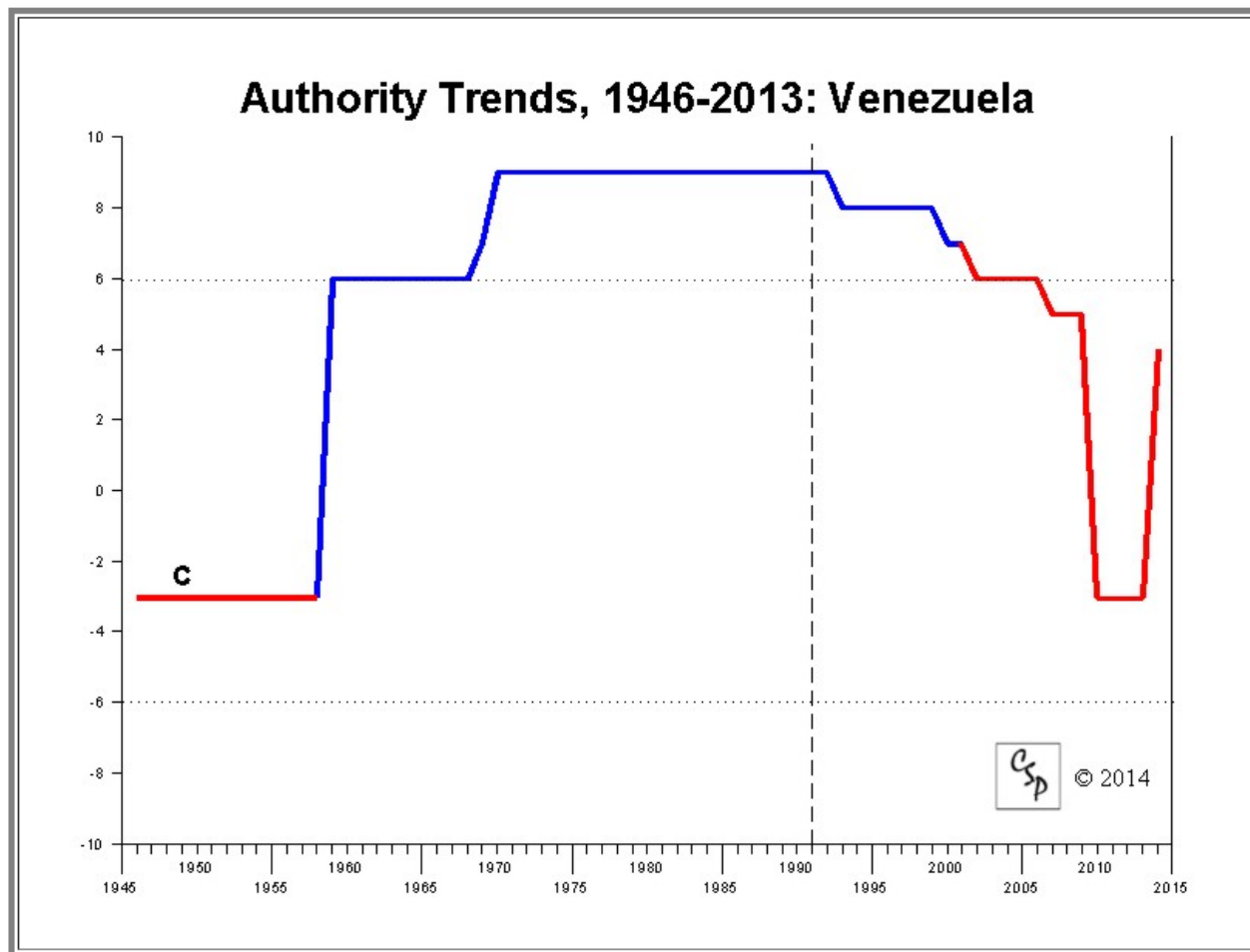
**State Failure Events** are denoted by a BOLD BLACK "S"

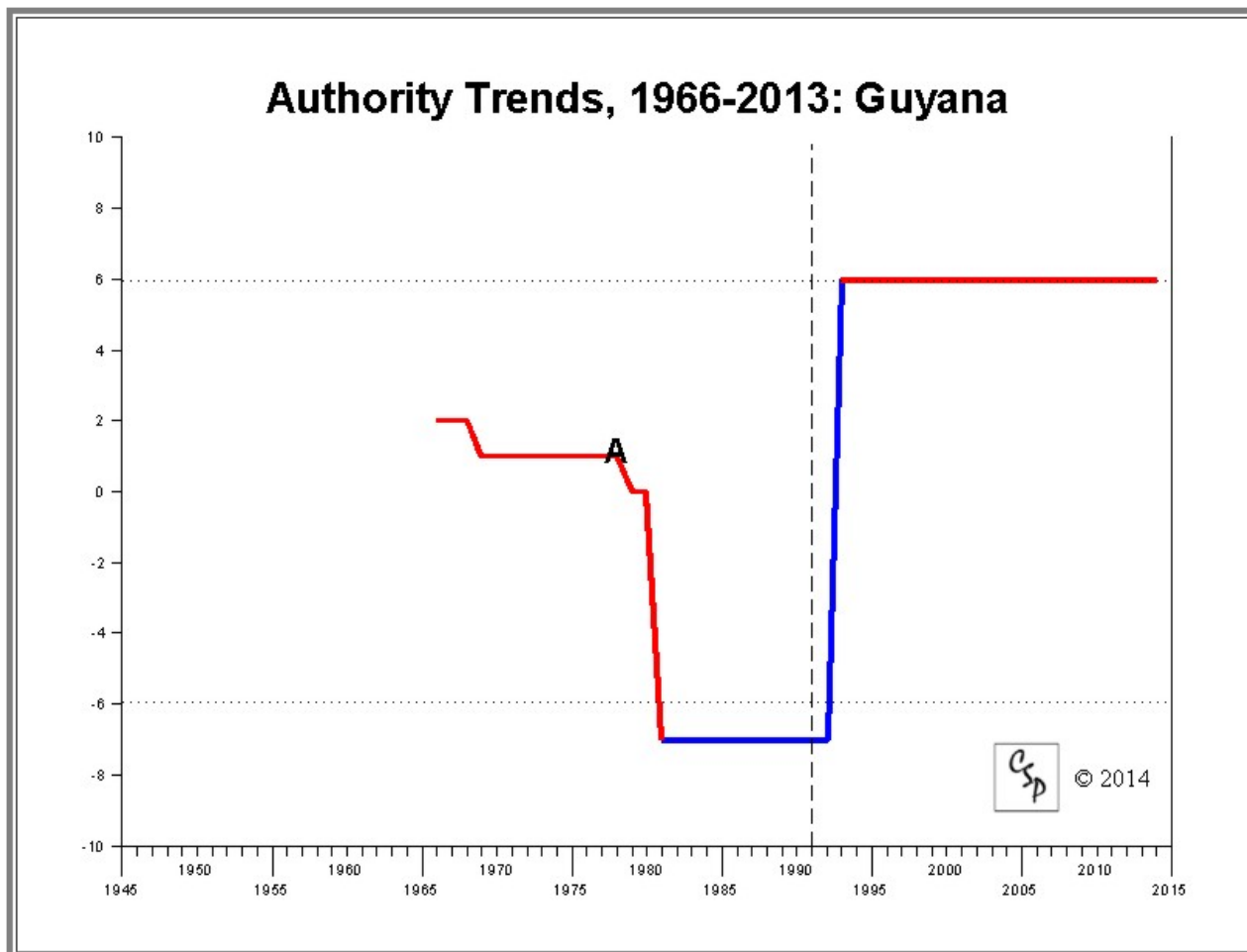
**Coup d'Etat Events** are denoted by a BOLD BLACK "C"

**Direct Foreign Military Regime Change Intervention** is denoted by a **BOLD ORANGE CARET** at the point of intervention along with an abbreviated designation of the intervening state(s) or international organization(s)

## II. POLITY IV: AUTHORITY TRENDS









### III. TABLE - BASIC STATISTICS

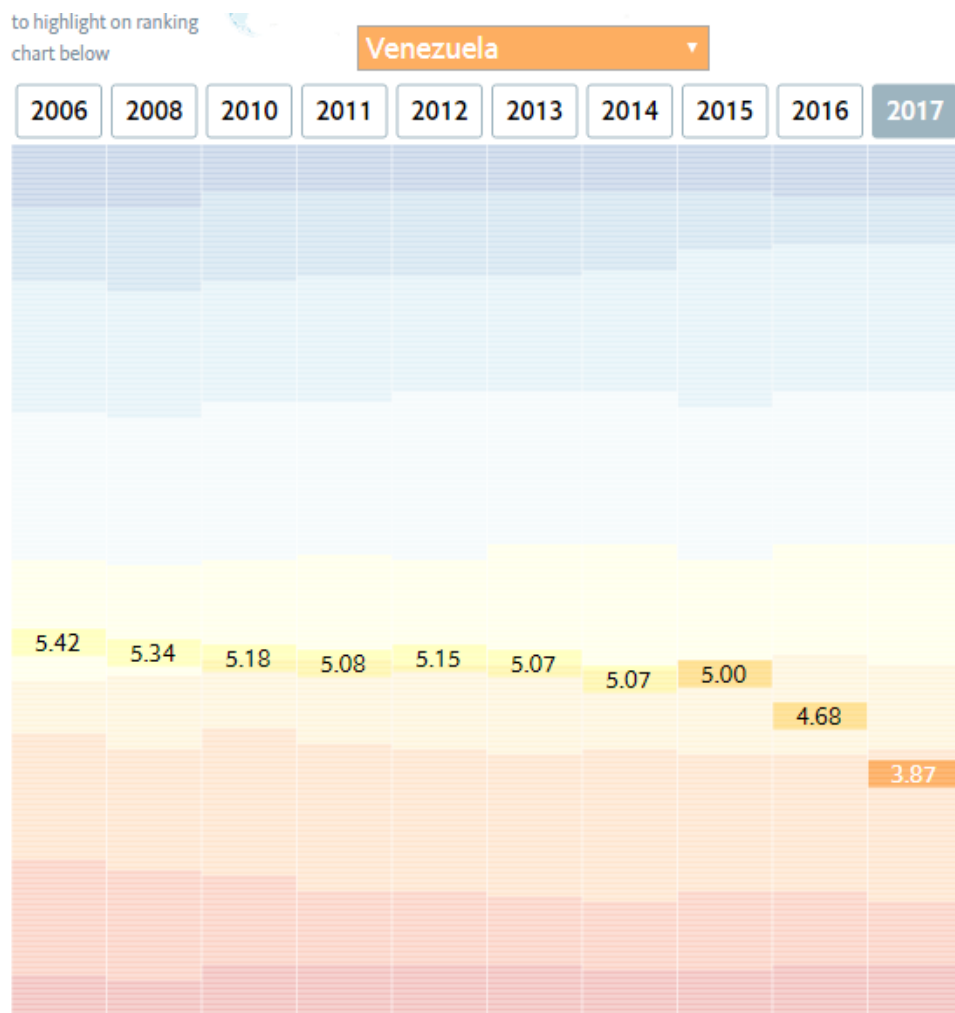
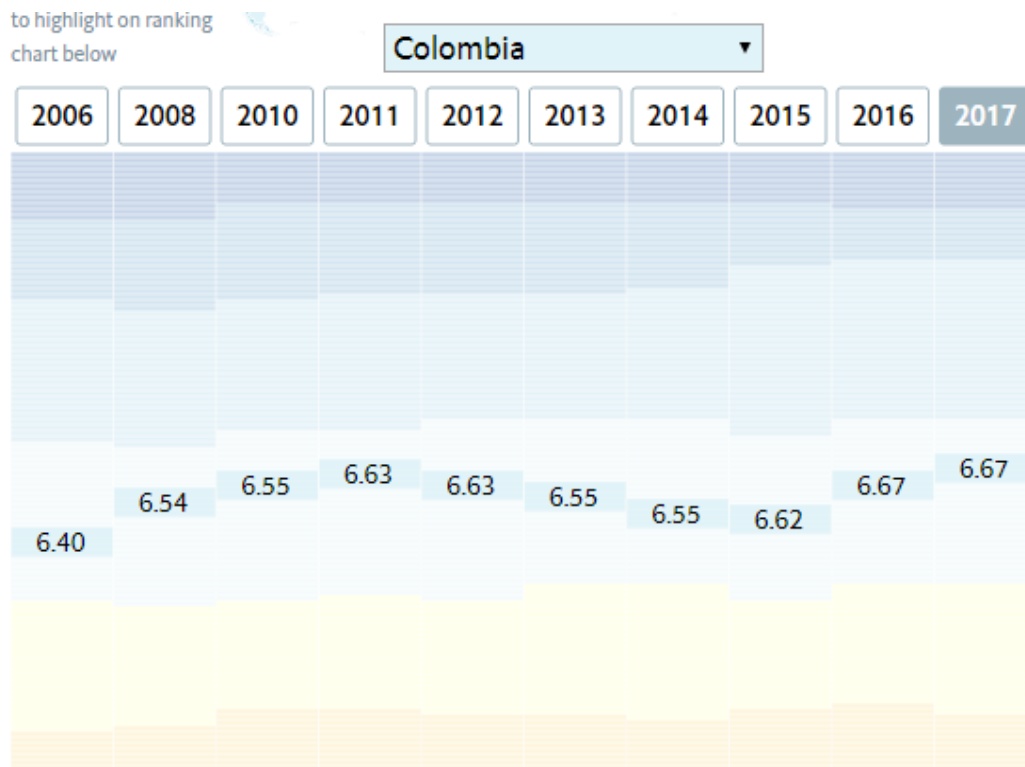
		COLOMBIA	VENEZUELA	GUYANA	
<i>Demography</i>	Population	47,698,524	31,304,016		737,718
	Surface (km <sup>2</sup> )	1,138,910	912,050		214,969
	Population density (/km <sup>2</sup> )	41.88	34.32		3.43
	Population border provinces (%)	3,152,049 (6.7%)	5,514,817 (17.6%)	1,578,640 (5.0%)	46,018 (6.2%)
	Surface border provinces (km <sup>2</sup> ) (%)	261,709 (23%)	330,845 (36.3%)	280,728 (30.8%)	67,552 (31.4%)
	Density border provinces (/km <sup>2</sup> )	12.04	16.67	5.62	0.68
<i>Economy</i>	GDP (billion \$)	712.5	389.4		6.4
	GDP per capita (\$)	14,500	12,400		8,300
	Export products	Petrol, coal, coffee	Petrol, bauxite		Sugar, gold, bauxite
	Trade partners	USA, Panama	USA, India, China		Canada, USA
<i>Military</i>	Military expenditure (billion)	24.9	3.9		0.09
	Military expenditure (% GDP)	3.5 %	1.0 %		1.4 %
<i>Border</i>	Total border length (km)	6,672	5,267	5,267	2,933
	Border with Venezuela (km / %)	2,341 / 35.1 %	2,341 / 44.4 %*	789 / 15.0 %**	789 / 26.9 %

Source: CIA The World Factbook, 2018; F.J. Wolters, own design

\* With Colombia

\*\* With Guyana

## IV. DEMOCRACY INDEX



to highlight on training  
chart below

Guyana

