



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

From Pawn to Player: An Analysis of Weak States' Sovereignty in Foreign Policy Decisions

O Flynn, Emily

Citation

O Flynn, E. (2023). *From Pawn to Player: An Analysis of Weak States' Sovereignty in Foreign Policy Decisions*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3642714>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



FROM PAWN TO PLAYER

An Analysis of Weak States' Sovereignty in Foreign
Policy Decisions

Student Name: Emily O'Flynn

Supervisor: Dr Soledad Valdivia-Rivera

MA International Relations
Leiden University
June 2023

Word Count: 14,988

ABSTRACT

Weak states are traditionally portrayed as ‘objects’ rather than ‘subjects’ in international politics. This would suggest that, although they are sovereign in nature, their ability to *practise* their sovereignty is restricted by their inherent weaknesses. Using Honduras as a case study, I seek to challenge this narrative by exploring if and how weak states can exercise agency in the international system - regardless of their size and strength. I argue that Honduras is strategically altering its foreign policy position vis-à-vis the One-China policy as an expression of sovereignty to achieve maximum economic and political gains for the weak state. In doing so, I simultaneously highlight the complex nature of sovereignty in the increasingly interconnected global environment. Questioning the traditional understanding of sovereignty as being absolute and indivisible is intended to open up potential avenues for weak states to be recognised as players – rather than pawns - on the international stage.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Chapter One: Literature Review, Central Concept and Methodology	6
Literature Review	6
Central Concept: Sovereignty	11
Methodology	14
Chapter Two: Sovereignty for Sale?	17
Love thy Neighbour	18
Friend or Foe?	21
An International Pariah?	23
Chapter Three: To Xi, or not to Xi	25
Breaking the Mould	29
Honduras: A Hedger?	31
A New Dependency?	33
Conclusion	37
References	40

INTRODUCTION

At the end of World War II, it was predicted that weak states would become increasingly unimportant in the international system (Lindell and Persson, 1986). As the power gap widened between the emerging superpowers and these weaker actors, many scholars argued that weak states would ‘disintegrate, cease growing in scope and may even shrink a little’ (Desch, 1996 p.237; Morgenthau, 1948, p.196). This suggests that today’s global order is characterised by great states interacting with one another to pursue their national interests, while weaker actors have little choice but to accept the asymmetrical balance of power and succumb to the unequal rules of the game (Efremova, 2019).

The above narrative, which has guided international relations (IR) for the last century, is challenged by one unassailable fact: against all odds (and scholarly predictions), weak states continue to survive in the international system. In fact, they have proven time and again that they are not as powerless as originally expected (Lindell and Persson, 1986). They have developed innovative strategies to leverage their limited resources, such as engaging in supranational organisations and building strategic alliances with similar actors (Eun et al., 2021). This allows them to have greater input in world affairs by amplifying their voice and increasing their bargaining potential.

The stark contrast between their material capacity and the influence that weak states can wield on the international stage presents what Rosenau (1980, p.20) calls ‘a genuine puzzle.’ At the heart of this puzzle lies the complex concept of sovereignty. It is often argued that weak states’ sovereignty is undermined by factors such as political instability and foreign aid dependency (Krasner, 1999). This jeopardises their ability to enact (foreign) policy decisions based on their own interests. In other words, although these states are sovereign in nature, their inherent weaknesses hinder their capacity to *exercise* sovereignty in relation to other (more powerful) states.

The elusive nature of weak state sovereignty, and the ability of these actors to survive in an international system dominated by larger powers, calls for more comprehensive research. As Keohane (1969, p.310) highlights, ‘If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant.’ This thesis, therefore, endeavours to redirect attention from the great powers and instead concentrate on the

overlooked capacity of weak states to exercise sovereignty in the global arena. To do so, it will attempt to answer the following research question:

To what extent are weak states sovereign in their foreign policy decisions?

Given that today's liberal world order is increasingly defined by multilateral engagement and globalisation, it is no longer sufficient to rely exclusively on a country's domestic policies as a means of understanding its nature or behaviour. The foreign policy decisions of any state – both weak and powerful alike – are a crucial indication of a country's sovereignty and autonomy. Investigating the extent to which weak states are sovereign in their foreign policy decisions is intended to shed light on their ability (or lack thereof) to pursue their national interests and assert their independence on the international stage. While the effects of exercising sovereignty on the wider international system are important in understanding weak state behaviour, it is ultimately beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse them extensively. Instead, the research question will concentrate on exploring the *capacity* of weak states to practise sovereignty in their foreign affairs. This will facilitate a more fruitful discussion into the complexities of modern-day sovereignty, and how that shapes the foreign policy decisions of weak states.

In an effort to address the above research question, Chapter One begins by exploring the existing literature pertaining to weak state foreign policy. More specifically, it concentrates on the structure-agency debate closely associated with weak state behaviour. It then outlines the central concept that guides the remainder of this thesis: sovereignty. Finally, it indicates the research methodology employed in the subsequent chapters, while simultaneously offering a justification for choosing Honduras as the case study. Chapter Two presents a historical analysis to identify if and how Honduras has practised its sovereignty since the 1980s. Relying largely on Spanish sources, this section is intended to challenge the traditional narrative of 'U.S.S Honduras', whereby the weaker state is presented merely as a *space* to be used by the United States (US), rather than as a sovereign actor. Instead, it offers an account of a weaker state strategically leasing its sovereignty to maximise economic and political gains. Finally, Chapter Three addresses Honduras' recent foreign policy decision to establish diplomatic relations with China. Framing this within the wider US-China geopolitical battle, it posits that Honduras is, in fact, exercising sovereign agency by pursuing a hedging strategy to achieve the best possible outcome for its population.

Overall, the above chapters are intended to shed light on weak states' underacknowledged capacity to exercise sovereignty in their foreign policy decisions, albeit to differing degrees due to both internal and external factors.

CHAPTER ONE:

LITERATURE REVIEW, CENTRAL CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY

Literature Review

This literature review explores the scholarly treatment of weak state foreign policy, laying a suitable foundation for the subsequent chapters to evaluate if and how Honduras exercised sovereignty in its foreign policy decisions over the last four decades. As illustrated below, the vast majority of scholarship has been dominated by structural assumptions, portraying weak states as pawns in the international system. Yet, when analysing any country's foreign policy – both weak and powerful alike - it is necessary to consider the agency of the actor in its decision-making. The following review positions itself at the heart of this debate by surveying the existing literature linked to this thesis' overarching question: To what extent are weak states sovereign in their foreign policy decisions?

Answering this question has proven problematic for IR scholars, not least because they have failed to reach a consensus on what exactly constitutes a weak state. Benedict (1967) argues that the primary material variable of a weak state is its smaller territories. However, Vital (1967) places greater emphasis on demographic factors - suggesting that a weak state has a population of less than 30 million. Meanwhile, Krause (2001) focuses on the country's economic capacity to determine its place in the hierarchical ranking of states. These scholars share the assumption that the 'weak' nature of a country is determined by the measurement of a single objective indicator. Although widely employed, the 'single variable' approach is problematic given that, no matter what indicator is chosen, there is no explicit 'cut-off value' to separate the weak states from the strong. Furthermore, even if two countries share a similar demographic or geographic aspect, they can be radically different in many other variables, making it illogical to place them in the same category as a 'weak' state.

In recent years, there has been a shift away from this 'single variable' approach, with scholars such as Handel (1990) determining weakness by a country's relation to others. Moreover, Keohane (1969) and Singer (1972) identify a weak state by its level of dependence on another state, ergo perceiving 'weak' states to be a relative concept. While this is useful in a

comparative sense, there is a risk that relying exclusively on relative measures would lead to overly simplistic definitions of weak states. For example, Knudsen (2002, p.184) claims that a weak state is ‘any state in a relationship of marked inferiority of power vis-à-vis another state.’ While this is true in certain cases, there are numerous examples which suggest that blindly trusting this definition would prove problematic. For instance, although France is less powerful than the US in many different aspects, it would be difficult to justify characterising it as a ‘weak’ state. Since a precise definition has yet to emerge, this thesis will employ a middle-ground approach, balancing the characterisation of a weak state between both absolute and relative terms. When referencing a weak state, it will henceforth relate to a territory with fewer resources, that is unable or unwilling to provide essential public services, govern legitimately, or ensure physical security for its citizens (Barston, 1973; Rice and Patrick, 2008).¹

Having identified a working definition of a weak state, it is now possible to explore the treatment of weak state foreign policy in IR literature thus far. As previously mentioned, existing IR scholarship has traditionally subscribed to structural approaches. This is due to structural theories’ propensity for treating state size and strength as intervening variables between a state’s foreign policy and the international system (Lobell, 2009, p.43). In this regard, states with greater material resources are capable of exerting influence in the regional and international environment to ensure their security. Conversely, the weaker states are presented merely as ‘objects’ of international politics, rather than ‘subjects’ (Eun et al., 2022). Such arguments assume that the structural attributes of a state’s weakness are the most important criteria that shape their foreign policy, ergo neglecting the importance of domestic-level considerations in the decision-making process of weaker states.

While authors employing structural approaches agree that these actors are hindered by external restraints, there is no consensus regarding what such theories say about weak state foreign policy behaviour. This discrepancy is epitomised in the literature on weak states’ use of balance-of-power politics. For example, Fox (1958, p.187) argues that these actors opt to maintain a ‘benevolent neutrality’ towards the larger power that is on the ‘winning side’. This concurs with Handel’s (1990, p.183) hypothesis that weak states pursue a strategy of neutrality as the risk of choosing a losing side outweighs the benefits of balancing.

¹ As the methodology section indicates, Honduras meets these criteria to be defined as a ‘weak’ state.

Conversely, Rothstein (1968, p.34) contends that these actors engage in balancing behaviour to avoid the emergence of a hegemony which could threaten the existing balance of power. On the other hand, Palmer and Morgan (2011, p.37) apply bandwagon theory to explain weaker states' foreign policy, claiming that these actors align with a stronger power which will provide it with security. This mirrors Walt's (1987, p.26) balance of threat theory, which argues that weak states are more likely to bandwagon than balance to guarantee their long-term survival.

The common thread binding these arguments together is they assume that weak states lack the room for political manoeuvre which is often enjoyed by middle and larger powers, resulting in their foreign policy being constrained by international structures. This implies that these actors are unable to fully exercise sovereignty in their foreign policies due to their inherent weaknesses. Bjol (1971, p.32) aptly summarises the above hypotheses by stressing that, for a weak state, 'the environment is a much more important variable than for the great power, and hence any reasoning about its role should probably start by an identification of the type of international system in which it has to operate.'

Indeed, the above scholarship suggests that weak states solely *react* to the international environment, rather than *enact* any substantial change. However, there is a growing body of literature attempting to challenge these structural assumptions by shedding light on the agency of weaker states. For example, Eun et al. (2021) argue that weak states exercise sovereign control through the manipulation of extra-regional competition or in supranational diplomatic settings. This can complicate the economic and/or security interests of larger states, ergo influencing the dynamics of the international system. Efremova (2019) uses game theory to concur with this, arguing that weaker states employ a variety of strategies (balancing, bandwagoning, hedging, or neutrality) to maximise their gains and leverage their position on the international stage. Moreover, Long (2015) claims that weak states can exert influence in asymmetrical relations by restraint-seeking, autonomy-enhancing, and gains-seeking. Such accounts differ from earlier scholarship as they suggest that weak states are pursuing the above strategies, not solely due to power-related constraints, but rather as a strategic attempt to enhance their international status and maximise their political and economic gains. Unlike the traditional structural narrative, these authors refrain from portraying weak states as inherent victims that are sovereign only in name.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of the structure-agency discourse underpinning weak-state literature can be found in the scholarship addressing the role of weaker actors in great power competition. This, too, fails to reach a consensus on whether weak states are players or pieces on the geopolitical chessboard. The latter forms the basis of de Soysa's (2017, p.1) argument that great powers achieve their foreign policy goals 'cheaply' by influencing the politics of weaker states. Farah and Yates (2020, p.47) offer a similar analysis of Latin America's role in the contemporary power competition between China and the US. They argue that the regional engagement of both superpowers is centred on their 'desire to diminish the influence and friendships' of other great actors in Latin America. This portrays the weak state as a *space* to be used by external powers in their geostrategic rivalry, rather than as a sovereign actor. Marston and Ramesh (2021) challenge this by arguing that great power competition offers weak states the opportunity to exercise sovereign agency and balance economic and strategic ties with countries that are attempting to carve out spheres of influence. Therefore, in great power rivalry, weaker actors have growing leverage which can, if used effectively, be translated into 'economic gains and diplomatic wins to bolster their own domestic political legitimacy' (ibid). Zuleta (2020) echoes this, suggesting that weaker states in Latin America are adopting a 'Machiavellian approach' towards the growing animosity between the US and China i.e., understanding world affairs as a product of human agency. By negotiating with Washington and Beijing in a triangular manner, these weaker actors can enhance their relational power and increase their ability to exercise sovereignty. These arguments serve to credit weak states with greater agency than was previously acknowledged. This, in turn, highlights the apparent gaps caused by structural theories' predisposition towards stronger actors.

Within the context of the US-China geopolitical competition, the One-China policy offers a suitable lens to explore if and how weak states can exercise sovereignty in their foreign policy decisions. Much of the scholarship subscribes to structural theories, suggesting that the decision of Taiwan's remaining allies can be attributed to restraints imposed by larger powers. For example, Portada (2020, p.1) suggests that Taipei's allies are unlikely to alter their recognition policy due to the 'threat of punitive measures' from the US, along with Taiwan's economic assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, Rich's (2009) analysis of 'dollar diplomacy' argues that weaker states are at the mercy of whichever country writes the largest cheque. This presents weak states as pawns in the US-China battle for influence, effectively stripping them of their sovereignty and agency. However, in recent

years, there is a nascent body of literature that counters this dominant view, suggesting that these weaker states do, in fact, exercise sovereignty over their foreign policy to gain a competitive advantage. Long and Urdinez (2020) are leading voices in this regard, arguing that Paraguay strategically uses its diplomatic recognition of Taiwan for status-seeking purposes. As the only remaining Taipei supporter in South America, Paraguay emphasizes friendship between ‘equals’, ergo enhancing their relational position on the international stage. Casas-Zamora (2009) presents a similar argument, suggesting that Costa Rica’s decision to be the first Central American country to switch diplomatic allegiances from Taipei to Beijing resulted in an ‘inordinate amount of attention’ from China. This, once again, sheds light on the underappreciated ability of weak states to strategically practise sovereignty in their foreign policy decision-making.

This thesis positions itself at the heart of the ongoing structure-agency debate by examining whether Honduras, as a weak state, exercises sovereignty in its foreign policy. In doing so, the following chapters will simultaneously explore if and how Honduras has been constrained by structural factors, namely its dependency on the US. According to Torres Calderón (2002), Honduras is a largely ‘unknown country’. Indeed, when compared to its Latin American counterparts, there is a notable scarcity of literature exclusively documenting Honduran foreign policy. In the few sources that address this, the authors present the country as a ‘banana republic’ - a space routinely exploited by the US for economic and military purposes (Dunkerley, 1993; Long, 2022; Schulz, 2018). These portrayals fail to adequately highlight Honduras’ capacity to exercise agency in its foreign policy decisions. This study, therefore, endeavours to contribute to existing IR scholarship by tracing oft-overlooked examples of Honduras, as a weak state, practising sovereignty in its foreign policy. Also, by critically assessing if these weak states can act independently, this thesis aims to shed light on the complex nature of state sovereignty in the increasingly interconnected world system.

Central Concept: Sovereignty

As the literature review elucidated, there is ongoing debate regarding weak states' capacity to exercise agency in their foreign policy decisions. A crucial, albeit contested, concept that underpins this scholarly discourse is *sovereignty*. The following section seeks to analyse the elusive nature of this concept. This will enable the subsequent chapters to assess the varying degrees of sovereignty that Honduras can practise in its foreign policy decisions, considering both internal and external factors.

For any country, both weak and powerful alike, sovereignty is arguably the most important factor to be treated as a state (Krasner, 2009). While there are multiple definitions for sovereignty, the concept simply means 'to rule over' (Roskin et al., 2003). The legal theory of sovereignty can be traced to Jean Bodin's *Six Books of Commonwealth* (1962, p.715), whereby sovereignty is framed as 'the absolute and perpetual power' of a commonwealth. As a staunch believer in the divine rights of monarchy rule, Bodin indicates that sovereignty is vested in an individual 'who recognises nothing, after God, that is greater than himself' (ibid). Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) echoes Bodin's theory that sovereignty is vested in the hands of a single person. However, he rejects the notion that such authority comes from a 'divine' source. Instead, Hobbes (2020, p.106) proposes that sovereignty is obtained 'when men agree amongst themselves to submit to some man, or assembly of men, voluntarily, on confidence to be protected by him against all others.'

Although offering different conceptualisations of sovereign authority, the above scholars share one core assumption: that sovereignty is absolute i.e., if authority is divided, then the actor in question is no longer sovereign. This was also recognised by Hinsley (1986, p.26), who defined sovereignty in terms of 'no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere.' However, Hinsley's work differs from the aforementioned theories as he argues that sovereignty belongs to the nation-state, rather than the monarchy, demonstrating a notable shift in political thought over the centuries. This is perhaps most evident in *Sovereignty: An Introduction and Brief History*, in which Philpott (1995, p.360) argues that 'before the 1648 Peace of Westphalia [...] there was no sovereignty; no authority was supreme within its territory.' Given that the Peace of Westphalia is equated with the birth of the nation-state, Philpott differs drastically from the aforementioned scholars by claiming that sovereignty did not exist before the emergence of the nation-state (Gross, 1984). He also argues that such

political authority is based on the legitimacy of the state, which is derived from a consensus-based source, such as a constitution, international law or a divine right (ibid).

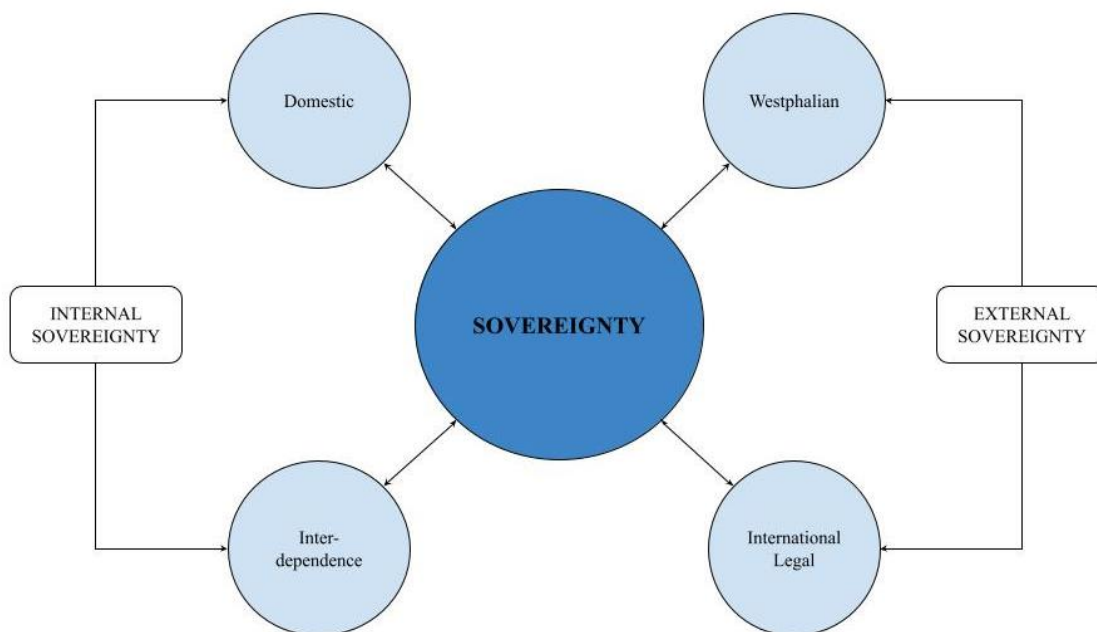
Although sovereignty is deemed by these scholars to be ‘absolute’ in nature, it possesses both internal and external scopes, which are described by Philpott (1995, p.355) as ‘coexistent and omnipresent’. Internal sovereignty exercises ultimate authority within the territorial confines of the state (Krasner, 1999). This implies a hierarchical relationship between the sovereign power and its subordinates (Lake, 2003). Conversely, external sovereignty refers to a state’s position in the international system, entailing the recognition by other states that the political entity is a legitimate actor in the global arena (Bull, 1977). In other words, external sovereignty suggests that the government exercises *de facto* administrative control and does not fall subordinate to a foreign actor, i.e., its domestic and foreign policies are not directed by other states. As previously mentioned in the introduction, focusing on foreign policy decisions allows this thesis to comprehensively analyse a weak state’s capacity to exercise both internal and *external* sovereignty in the international system.

Although the internal and external dimensions of sovereignty are traditionally perceived as indivisible, the current international system poses significant challenges to this conventional understanding. Firstly, engagement in multilateral institutions – which have become a defining feature of the liberal world order – constrain member states’ status regarding sovereignty given that they must abide by the rules of supranational organisations (Steinberg, 2004). Secondly, powerful nations – particularly the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the US) – wield asymmetrical influence on weaker states. Therefore, these weak actors are generally forced to align their foreign policies with the interests of more powerful states in the international system (Yoo, 2010). Furthermore, poorer countries mortgage their sovereignty by calling on the international community to provide economic, military, and technical assistance (Moon, 1983). The more dependent a weaker state is on foreign aid, the more likely it is to conform to the policies and interests of the donor country (ibid.). Finally, a state (particularly one that is failed, small, or weak) may not have sufficient economic, military, or political resources to assert its sovereignty in the international arena (Keohane, 1969). Such limitations suggest that the preservation of state sovereignty greatly depends on the nature of the triangular relationship between the sovereign, the society, and the wider international community.

The above critiques challenge the ‘absolute’ nature of sovereignty, encouraging Krasner (2001, pp.231-233) to identify four dimensions which enable sovereignty to be analysed in a matter of varying *degrees*. These categories include:

- Domestic Sovereignty – the capacity of state authorities to exercise control;
- Interdependence Sovereignty – the ability of a state to control movement across its borders;
- International Legal Sovereignty – the formal recognition by other sovereign states;
- Westphalian Sovereignty – the absence of external sources of authority.

Figure 1 – Krasner’s Sovereign State Model:



These classifications are crucial to the ensuing analysis of weak state decision-making given that these actors are often noted for their lack of state capacity and/or legitimacy. This correlates with Steinberg’s theory (2004, p. 329) that ‘from a behavioural perspective, not all states are sovereign.’ In other words, although a state may have legal sovereignty, its ability to *exercise* such sovereignty can be undermined by structural constraints. This is intricately related to the issue of power in the international system, as discussed in the literature review. However, Krasner’s sovereignty model (see Figure 1) suggests that a political entity can have one type of sovereignty but not the other three. This allows for a discussion that moves beyond the binary understanding of sovereignty as being ‘absolute’.

As a prototypical weak state, Honduras challenges the conventional conceptualisation of sovereignty. The country's systemic corruption and poor human rights record undermine its internal sovereignty as the state is failing to meet its obligations to its citizens. Its external sovereignty is also compromised by interference from foreign actors, including other states (namely the US) and supranational institutions. This suggests that there is a correlation between weak states and a lack of sovereignty as these countries are essentially forced to cede their sovereignty to more powerful actors to guarantee their economic and political survival. Yet, one could argue that the rapid acceleration of globalisation and multilateralism means that no state – neither weak nor strong – is completely independent in its decision-making. With this in mind, the following chapters will explore the *extent* to which Honduras is sovereign in its foreign policy choices, more generally, and in its recent decision to establish diplomatic relations with China, specifically.

Methodology

As identified in the literature review, the propensity for IR scholarship to concentrate on greater powers has created a noticeable gap in the examination of weak state foreign policy (Sharman, 2017; Long, 2020). This thesis endeavours to address this scholarly omission by employing an exploratory case study methodology to analyse the extent to which Honduras, as a weak state, exercises sovereignty in its foreign policy decisions.

The exploratory case study is an appropriate method as it is used when there is no pre-determined outcome (Yin, 2014). This facilitates a comprehensive analysis of Honduras' capacity to exercise sovereignty, both in a historical context (Chapter Two) and in its more recent decision-making (Chapter Three). However, in choosing to focus on a single case study, it must be acknowledged that this thesis' conclusion is restricted in its ability to provide 'robustness' and 'generalizability' (Lucas, 2018, p.216). Therefore, further research is required to draw broader interpretations regarding the foreign policy behaviour of weak states, other than Honduras, in the international system.

Having established the type of case study employed, it is now necessary to justify choosing Honduras as its subject. In doing so, it is essential to characterise it as a 'weak' state. Firstly,

with a population of only 10.3 million people, Honduras has the second-highest homicide rate in the world, with 36.33 murders per 100,000 people in 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2022). This naturally threatens the physical security of citizens. Corruption is also commonplace, causing the country to rank as the 23rd most corrupt state on the globe, ergo undermining the ability of Honduras' leaders to govern legitimately (Transparency International, 2022). Equally problematic is the government's incapacity to provide essential services to its citizens. According to the most recent ACAPS report (2023), only 36% of Hondurans have access to sewage systems and only 17% of Honduran adolescents attend high school. These figures resulted in the Honduran government receiving an effectiveness grade of 33%, which is substantially lower than neighbouring Nicaragua (67%) and El Salvador (46%) (Transparency International, 2022). While these statistics alone offer ample proof of Honduras' 'weakness' (in both absolute and relative terms), the Fund for Peace (2023) solidifies this by ranking Honduras as the 58th weakest country in the world, and the third weakest in Latin America (after Venezuela and Haiti). Therefore, as a prototypical weak state, Honduran foreign policy offers a suitable lens to study if and how weak state sovereignty can be exercised.

Although many weak states were applicable to this study, Honduras was ultimately chosen as its recent change in foreign policy decision vis-à-vis the One-China policy offers the greatest potential for a fruitful discussion on weak state agency. Structural theories argue that Honduras is constrained by its geographical proximity to the US, its profound economic instability, and its political isolation following a constitutional crisis in 2009 (as detailed in Chapter Two). However, Honduras' recent outreach to Beijing suggests that this weak state is, indeed, capable of practising sovereignty in its decision-making as it is notably shifting away from US interests. This challenges the aforementioned structural assumption that weak states are resigned to exclusively balance or bandwagon in balance-of-power politics. Instead, Honduras, as a weak state, appears to be assuming a 'middle-ground' position in the US-China geopolitical competition. Therefore, conducting an in-depth analysis of the rationale behind Honduras' recent foreign policy decision is intended to shed light on weak state behaviour and the potential for these actors to exercise sovereignty on the international stage.

The decision to (1) use Honduras as a case study and (2) focus specifically on Castro's recent decision to recognise China has strongly influenced the source selection for this thesis. The exploratory case study methodology generally relies on a broad source base to establish a

chain of evidence and, in turn, construct validity (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the empirical analysis in the following chapters is rooted in evidence drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Although Chapter Two is a historical analysis of Honduras' foreign policy since the 1980s, the relevant information is largely gathered from secondary sources. Where possible, data was obtained from Honduran sources; however, a lack of available official government publications online made it difficult to include a wide array of primary documents. It must be noted that primary US sources, such as CIA archival material and government records, were more readily available. Yet, given that this thesis endeavours to give a voice to the weaker state, it was decided to favour secondary Honduran sources over primary US documents.

In contrast, due to the recent nature of Castro's decision to establish diplomatic relations with China, Chapter Three works predominantly with primary data. This was principally extracted from official government declarations and newspaper articles, most of which were from the Latin American region. Once again, since this thesis aims to understand the rationale behind Honduras' foreign policy choices, vernacular sources were preferred over those written in English.² It should also be noted that, due to linguistic limitations, this study could not extensively analyse data from Chinese or Taiwanese sources. However, given that the project's protagonist is Honduras, this should not bear any significant impact on the thesis' overall conclusion. By amalgamating both primary and secondary sources, the following chapters endeavour to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the extent to which Honduras is sovereign in its foreign policy decisions.

² All Spanish translations – from both primary and secondary sources – are my own.

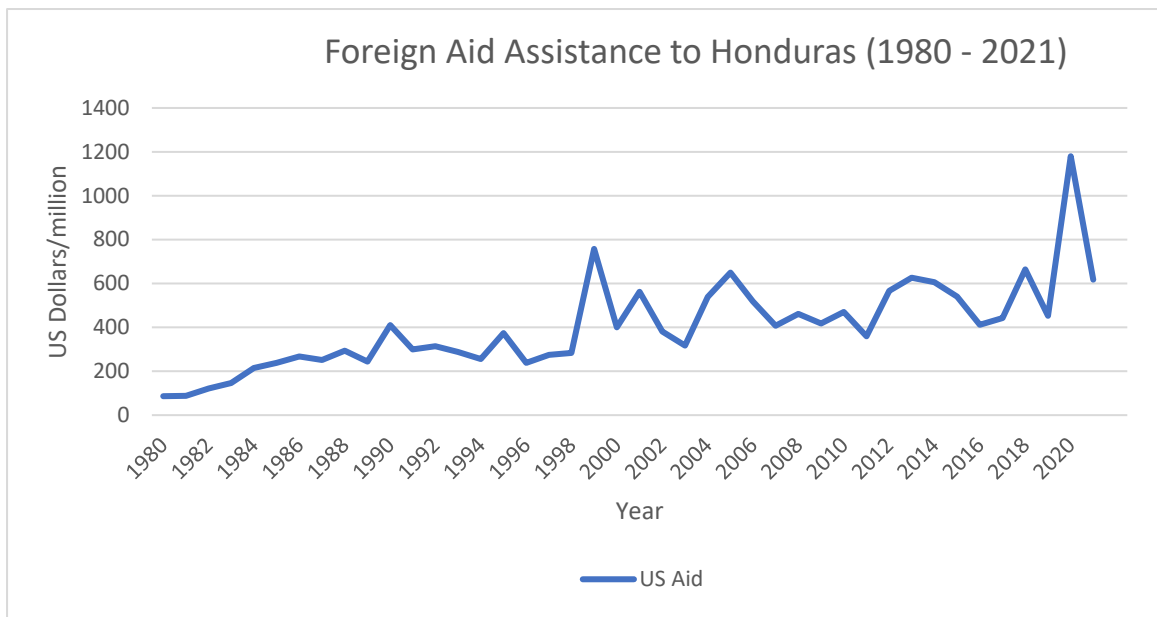
CHAPTER TWO: Sovereignty for Sale?

As an independent country since 1821, and according to its Constitution, Honduras is a ‘sovereign [...] free, democratic republic’ (Tribunal Superior de Cuentas, 1982, p.1). However, as the scholarly debate in Chapter One elucidated, the country’s inherent weaknesses challenge the extent to which Honduras is capable of *exercising* its sovereignty. This chapter endeavours to explore if and how Honduras has practised sovereignty in its foreign policy over the last four decades, despite internal and external constraints. To do so, it will use the foreign policy of President Suazo in the 1980s as its point of departure, tracing critical junctures in the exercise of sovereignty up to the present day.³ This historical analysis aims to provide a suitable foundation for Chapter Three to focus specifically on the extent to which Honduras is sovereign in its recent foreign policy decision vis-à-vis the One-China policy.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Honduras was both structurally and materially ‘weak’. Within its first century of independence, Honduras was victim to 126 changes of government and 385 internal rebellions, suggesting that anarchy was commonplace in the Central American republic (Lafeber, 1984, p.22). This lack of political stability hindered the state’s capacity to provide essential services. For example, according to the 1974 census, 40.5% of the population was illiterate and 67.8% had no access to sanitary facilities (El Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía, 1985, p.39). Moreover, the country’s economy was almost exclusively reliant on agrarian exports. This was closely associated with the influx of US-owned banana corporations in the early twentieth century, turning Honduras into a ‘banana republic’ - a weak state with an economy dependent on the export of natural resources (O Henry, 1904). Consequently, in 1980, 40.6% of its exports comprised agricultural products - primarily bananas and coffee - most of which were sold to the US (33%) (Centro de Información sobre Desastres y Salud, 1985). Furthermore, Honduras’ foreign debt at the time was \$1.7 billion, and its foreign currency reserves fell from \$116 million in 1979 to \$8 million in 1981 (US Committee on Foreign Affairs, 1982, p.7).

³ For further reading on structural limitations to Honduran sovereignty in the early twentieth century, refer to: Merrill, T. 1995. *Honduras: a country study*. DA, Pam: Library of Congress. Schulz, D. 2018. *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America*. New York: Routledge.

Figure 2 -Net Development Assistance and Aid Received by Honduras (1980 – 2021):



Source: World Bank, 2023.

Such economic precarity made the country highly reliant on financial support from the US (as seen in Figure 2). For example, in 1980, Honduras received \$53.1 million in economic aid and \$3.9 million in military aid from the US – a figure which increased substantially over the decade (Sanford, 1989, p.27). This is important as the more reliant a weak state is on foreign credit, the more likely it is to align its policies with the interests of the creditor, ergo exercising limited sovereignty in its decision-making (Moon, 1983). Aside from these financial weaknesses, Honduras was equally confronted with profound security challenges due to its precarious geographical location between Nicaragua and El Salvador, both of which were experiencing advances of ‘pro-Soviet forces’ (Merrill, 1995, p.46).

Love thy Neighbour

This was the context within which Roberto Suazo Córdova inherited the Honduran presidency, following the country’s first democratic elections in January 1982 (Chocano, 1990). As many weak states do when confronted with security threats, Suazo initially presented the Organisation of American States (OAS) with a foreign policy centred on the pursuit of peace and democracy, stating that Honduras would assume a neutral position in Central American conflicts (ibid). However, within two months, Honduras’ foreign policy had become characterised by militarisation, namely, the repression of revolutionary

movements in neighbouring territories. Paz Aguilar (1983, p.125) argues that this shift occurred due to the ‘radicalisation and polarisation’ in each Central American country, making it difficult to create a climate of peace and co-existence via dialogue alone. Suazo’s policy changes mirrored US foreign policy toward Central America at the time, with both countries profoundly concerned about the Sandinistas in neighbouring Nicaragua and the leftist movement in El Salvador.⁴ To achieve the weaker state’s foreign policy goals and maximise its security, Suazo leased the use of Honduran military bases to the US (Ojeda, 2007, p.104). As a result, the Reagan administration tripled the number of US advisers in Honduras, sent one hundred Green Beret officials to the Soto Cano base to train Salvadoran and Honduran soldiers, and offered military grants of \$77.5 million (Shepherd, 1984).

Given their close alignment of foreign policies, as well as the phenomenal influx of US aid and personnel over the decade, the traditional narrative is that Honduran leadership became subordinate to the US, lacking any substantial agency or autonomy (Phillips, 2017, Lafeber, 1984; Shepherd, 1984). In other words, as a strategically located weak state, Honduras was *obliged* to succumb to US pressure and cede its territory and sovereignty to the regional hegemon in return for economic assistance. Indeed, Suazo’s decision to lease Honduras’ military bases was a violation of the country’s Constitution (Phillips, 2017). Moreover, Honduran law stipulates that the armed forces commander-in-chief must serve a fixed term in office. Yet, this rule was routinely broken between 1980 and 1987, when there were four rotations of military chiefs – mirroring the number of US ambassadors to Honduras during the same period (Meza, 1988, p.18). This alone would suggest that Honduran policy was subjected to a significant degree of US influence in its domestic policies. Perhaps the greatest illustration of this alleged loss of sovereignty is found in the Honduran National Security Council’s report to the Kissinger Commission which proposed that it may be necessary to station US troops permanently in Honduras, as it did in South Korea, or to establish a US protectorate, mirroring Puerto Rico (Paz Aguilar, 1983, p.126). Therefore, if accepting the traditional definition of sovereignty as having absolute authority without any external interference, one could suggest that the exercise of Honduras’ sovereignty was significantly restricted during this time.

⁴ For further reading on US foreign policy in the 1980s, refer to: Middlebrook, K.J. and Rico, C. 1988. *The United States and Latin America in the 1980s: Contending perspectives on a decade of crisis*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

However, if the concept of sovereignty is perceived as ‘organising domestic and international politics to protect and enhance the security and common good of the individuals who form a political community’, the line between loss and leverage of Honduran sovereignty becomes far blurrier (Ludsin, 2013, p.101). Faced with the aforementioned economic and security challenges, the easiest way for Honduran leaders to protect the weaker state and secure foreign investment was to align their foreign policy with the US. According to Shepherd (1984, p.125), the Honduran government was ‘willing to tell the United States virtually anything it [wanted] to hear and do whatever [was] necessary to ensure US support.’ Suazo’s ‘Faustian’ objectives were transparent throughout his presidential rule as he routinely demanded economic compensation in exchange for Honduras’ military support. In other words, Suazo was attempting to overcome the country’s financial weaknesses by using its strategic location as leverage to secure external economic assistance and ‘have at hand a preferential external market’ (Torres Caldaron, 1985, p.5). Indeed, Honduras’ aid receipts from the US drastically increased from \$3.9 million in 1980 to \$77.5 million in 1984 – an unprecedented level of aid for a weak state (Ruhl, 1996, p.38). Therefore, by challenging the traditional concept of sovereignty, one could suggest that Suazo’s foreign policy gamble to become a strategic US ally was a pragmatic attempt to exercise some form of agency with the limited resources available to the weaker state.

Acting in accordance with the common good is one of the two fundamental requirements for an authority to claim sovereign rights (Ludsin, 2013, p.119). Suazo’s aforementioned attempt to ensure Honduras’ socio-economic security by cooperating with the US could be perceived as fulfilling this obligation. However, the key challenge to the government’s capacity to exercise sovereignty lies with the second requirement: the authority must hold domestic legitimacy (ibid). This was undermined by the military’s prominent role in Honduras’ domestic affairs. To win the presidency in the first place, Suazo, allied himself with Colonel Gustavo Álvarez Martínez, exchanging the antimilitary and semi-reformist traditions of the Liberal Party for guaranteed military support (Salomón, 1994). As promised, Suazo appointed Álvarez head of the military, and both elites worked together to solidify US-Honduran alliances (Eguizábal and Rojas, 2011). It is important to note that Álvarez was, himself, a staunch anti-communist. Therefore, his desire to cooperate with the US in fighting communism in neighbouring Nicaragua was out of consensus, rather than mere compliance with the US (Shepherd, 1984). However, Álvarez’s appointment quickly translated into an expansion of the army’s political autonomy at the expense of the government’s legitimacy.

Given that the country's foreign policy was centred on national security, Álvarez – as head of the military – essentially became the orchestrator of policy decisions (Selser, 1984). For example, he *directly* negotiated with the US vis-à-vis the presence of the anti-Sandinista Contras in Honduras and demanded \$300 million in military support (Merrill, 1995, p.197). Furthermore, when the Nicaraguan leftist guerrilla, Edén Pastora, sought refuge in Honduras, he appealed directly to General Álvarez, without first consulting the government's immigration authorities (Meza, 1988). This would suggest that, at the time, Honduras' internal sovereignty was compromised by the influence that army officials wielded vis-à-vis the country's domestic and foreign policies.

Friend or Foe?

The waning of civil conflict in Central America encouraged a shift in Honduras' foreign policy in the 1990s, most notably regarding a weakening alliance with the US (Merrill, 1995). Many scholars (Schulz, 2018; Long, 2022; Merrill, 1995) attribute this to the general decline of US foreign policy interest in the region. This narrative would suggest that Honduras' claim for greater sovereignty was prompted by the fact that the US no longer needed to avail of the Central American republic's strategic location. However, before the end of the Contra war in Nicaragua, there was a growing demand in Honduras to exercise greater sovereignty. On the military level, such a bid for enhanced sovereign control was evident in the ousting of General Álvarez, and the subsequent appointment of General Walter Lopez Reyes in 1984. The latter adopted a 'reserved' stance towards US-Honduran military ties. He closed the Regional Military Training Centre and aimed to scale back the scope of joint military exercises (Meza, 1988, p.18). On the political level, discontent towards US interference was evinced in the *Manifiesto patriótico al pueblo hondureño* – a document put forward by the opposition parties which denounced external influence in the country's domestic affairs (Eguizábal et al, 2017). One month later, in January 1985, these parties formed the *Coordinadora Democrática Constitucionalista de Oposición* party, calling for greater sovereignty to increase the likelihood of peace (ibid.). This deviates from the traditional school of thought by suggesting that Honduras' foreign policy shift from the US in the 1990s was a 'bottom-up' initiative prompted by the Honduran public, rather than the traditional 'top-down' narrative of the US imposing rules on the weaker state.

In either case, the combination of increasing public discontent and the US retreat from Central America caused a rupture in the strategic alliance between Washington and Tegucigalpa. This was reflected in the decline of US investment from \$213 million in 1990 to \$60 million in 1993 (Dunkerley, 1993, p.10). Furthermore, the US became increasingly willing to criticise Honduras for its human rights record (Merrill, 1995). This allowed both the Roma (1990-1994) and Reina (1994-1998) governments to concentrate their foreign policies on enhancing regional engagement, particularly economic integration, rather than exclusively maintaining stringent bilateral cooperation with the US (Sosa Iglesias, 2017). As a result, Honduras became a member of the Plan de Acción Económica de Centroamérica (1990); Parlamento Centroamericano (1991); and Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (1993) (Merrill, 1995).

One could argue that the decision to centre Honduras' foreign policy on multilateral engagement further undermined state sovereignty since the country became restricted by the regulations of the aforementioned international organisations. However, external sovereignty states that a country must *consent* to be tied to such obligations given that no other government has the authority to bind it to supranational institutions (Ludsin, 2013). Since this was indeed the case with both the Roma and Reina administrations, it appears that Honduras' sovereignty vis-à-vis its foreign policy decision to engage in multilateralism remained largely intact. Furthermore, in the contemporary context of globalisation, it could be suggested that the traditional understanding of sovereignty as 'autonomy' is no longer relevant. Instead, sovereignty should be characterised as 'status, membership, connection to the rest of the world and the political ability to be an actor within it' (ibid, p.106). This revised definition of sovereignty implies that Honduras' engagement in the aforementioned institutions was, in fact, an expression - rather than a regression - of sovereignty.

An International Pariah?

In recent years, it appears that Honduras' consent vis-à-vis multilateral engagement has been overridden by external actors. Following the 2009 *US-backed* coup against President Zelaya, Honduras was suspended from the Organisation of American States (OAS, 2009).⁵ The OAS' decision could be interpreted as the institution having superior authority over Honduras regardless of consent, which ultimately undermines the country's external sovereignty. Deemed an 'international pariah', the socio-political instability in the coup's aftermath made Honduras reliant on US aid as it was one of the few countries that refused to label Zelaya's ousting a 'coup' (The Economist, 2011). In other words, Honduras' structural weaknesses – which were prompted by US interference - forced it into asymmetrical relations in exchange for foreign aid. Such asymmetries were reflected in President Trump's withholding of US aid to encourage compliance with his antimigration policies, which included the cancellation of 'Temporary Protected Status' for 57,000 Hondurans in the US (Rosenberg and Palencia, 2018). More recently, the Biden administration introduced anticorruption measures which bypassed the Honduran government (Long, 2022). Despite such increasingly one-sided US objectives, Honduras continued to sacrifice its external sovereignty by facilitating US influence in its foreign policy decisions. For example, Hernández's government supported Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital (ibid). Furthermore, in 2018, Honduras had the third highest UN voting coincidence with the US (68%) (US Department of State, 2019). Such support indicates that Honduras' capacity to exercise sovereignty has been significantly hindered by its post-coup geopolitical isolation and reliance on the US.

This chapter illustrated how Honduras' 'absolute' sovereignty in its foreign policy decisions has historically been weakened by interference from both internal and external actors. In the 1980s, economic and security conditions prompted Honduras to cede a significant degree of its sovereignty to the national army and the US in an effort to secure increased financial and military support for the weak state. In the 1990s, Honduran sovereignty became increasingly restrained by the country's compliance with multilateral regulations as a new member of international organisations. In recent years, Honduras attempted to navigate a profound period of international isolation, thereby relinquishing a certain degree of sovereignty by

⁵ For comprehensive analysis of US involvement in the 2009 coup against President Zelaya, refer to: Johnston, J. 2017. How Pentagon officials may have encouraged a 2009 coup in Honduras. *The Intercept*. Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2017/08/29/honduras-coup-us-defense-department-center-hemispheric-defense-studies-chds/> [Accessed: March 31, 2023].

aligning its foreign policy decisions with those of the US in exchange for financial support. This leads to the conclusion that absolute sovereignty is a luxury that weak states, such as Honduras, simply cannot afford. However, this chapter has also noted that, up until the 2009 coup, Honduran officials *consented* to such external influence in an effort to alleviate the state's structural and material weaknesses. Therefore, if one interprets sovereignty as seeking to act in accordance with the common good, it is far more difficult to distinguish between leveraging and losing sovereign power. In this regard, throughout the last four decades, Honduran officials have performed a strategic balancing act between sacrificing their sovereign authority and seizing vital opportunities to guarantee state survival. Yet, can the same be said for Honduras' more recent foreign policy decision to establish diplomatic relations with China?

CHAPTER THREE

To Xi, or not to Xi

On the 25th of March 2023, Honduras announced that it would establish official diplomatic relations with China (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y Cooperación Internacional, 2023a). In doing so, Honduras simultaneously cut diplomatic ties with Taipei, signalling that, after eighty-two years, it no longer recognised Taiwan as an independent state (ibid., 2023b). This action is intrinsically linked to the One-China policy, which declares that a nation can conduct official diplomatic relations with either China *or* Taiwan (Hsieh, 2009).⁶ Honduras' recent decision has left Taipei with only thirteen formal diplomatic allies, none of which exert significant economic or political influence (Al Jazeera, 2023). It has also caused consternation in Washington since the US has traditionally allied itself with Taiwan to limit China's expansion of influence (ibid.). Through an analysis of official government declarations and newspaper articles, this chapter argues that Honduras' recent decision to establish diplomatic relations with China reflects greater sovereignty in the weaker state's foreign policy by gradually pivoting away from US interests. Arriving at this conclusion first requires a discussion on the reasons behind Castro's initial reversal of her electoral promise to cut ties with Taiwan, suggesting that her sovereignty was originally limited by structural factors, namely Honduras' economic dependence on the US. The remaining analysis will concentrate on the country's recent foreign policy decision to recognise Beijing instead of Taipei. In doing so, this chapter is intended to offer further reflection on the complexity of weak state sovereignty and the ability of these actors to exercise agency in the international system.

As Chapter Two made abundantly clear, over the past four decades, Honduras has struggled with profound structural and material weaknesses. This has remained largely unchanged in recent years. Upon accession to the presidency in 2021, Xiomara Castro inherited a country that faced severe economic, political, and social instability. This was acknowledged in her inaugural speech, whereby she claimed that 'Honduras has been in a state of collapse for the last twelve years and I receive it in bankruptcy' (SEDESOL, 2022). Indeed, Honduras suffers

⁶ For further reading on the One-China policy, refer to: Jue, S. 2005. "The 'One China' Policy: Terms of Art," *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 12(2), pp. 159–168.

from a large foreign debt of \$9.2 billion and an equally significant internal debt of \$7.5 billion (Mandelbaum, 2022). It also remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with nearly 50% of the population (4.4 million) living in poverty (World Bank, 2023). Furthermore, high levels of violent crime, unemployment, and the Covid-19 pandemic encouraged more than 680,000 Hondurans to emigrate to the US (ibid.). Equally problematic is the fact that less than 20% of the Honduran population trusts the national government (Lima, 2022). Due to these weaknesses, Castro faced the challenge of restoring the image of citizenship, legitimacy, and sovereignty in the country's leadership. This was reflected in her speech at the UN's 77th General Assembly, where she declared: 'Do not continue trying to destabilize Honduras, and dictate your measures or choose with whom we should relate' (United Nations, 2022). Having engaged with Chapter Two's historiography, one could suggest that this message was directed at the US, indicating that Honduras would seek to exercise greater agency in its decision-making.

This sentiment was reflected in article 8.1 of Castro's presidential plan, which offered a foreign policy guided by citizenship, sovereignty and solidarity (Partido Libertad y Refundación Libre, 2021). To achieve this, the left-wing Libre candidate promised that, upon accession, she would 'immediately establish the most cordial and friendly relations with the People's Republic of China' (ibid., p.49). This effort to 'join the world's fastest market' was forecasted to result in a substantial increase in the country's trade and development due to China's growing investment trajectory in the region – see Figure 3 (ibid). This was particularly pressing within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as it was hoped that the establishment of diplomatic relations with China would encourage the donation of vaccines to Honduras, which had less than 40% of its population vaccinated at the time (Mathieu, 2020). Furthermore, it was anticipated that the diplomatic switch would translate into increased investment in Honduran development projects given that Chinese enterprises had already invested \$17 billion in the region (Ezrati, 2022).

Figure 3 - Foreign Direct Investment in Latin America (2011-2021):



Source: Statista, 2022.

However, upon accession to the presidency in November 2021, Castro surprisingly reversed her decision to alter the country’s position regarding the One-China policy and instead vowed to maintain the status quo by continuing to recognise Taiwan. This action (or lack thereof) was justified by government officials as being based on ‘a responsibility to Taiwan as someone with whom [they] have had a good relationship’ (Ernest, 2021). Indeed, over the eight decades of diplomatic relations, Taiwan has been a generous partner to Honduras. Since 2006, Taipei has loaned the Central American country \$205 million, while simultaneously donating another \$27 million (Menchu, 2017). Furthermore, following the devastating effects of Hurricane Eta in 2020, Taipei donated \$200,000 to Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua (Strong, 2020). However, one could equally argue that, despite not having official diplomatic relations, China has also proven itself to be a generous actor in Honduras. For example, Beijing invested \$298 million in the construction of one of the largest hydroelectric dams in Honduras, which was inaugurated in January 2021 (Palencia et al., 2023). Additionally, in the last decade, China has become Honduras’ second-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching \$2 billion in 2021 (Statista, 2022). Nevertheless, according to Honduras’ Foreign Minister, Eduardo Enrique Reina, ‘establishing relations with China [was] not a priority’ for Honduras (Associated Press News, 2022). Both of these official statements are contradicted by the very fact that Castro had listed Honduran-Chinese relations as the primary foreign

policy goal in the *Plan de Gobierno para Refundar Honduras* during her electoral campaign (Partido Libertad y Refundación Libre, 2021).

Taking into account structural assumptions, one could argue that Honduras' decision was heavily influenced by the weak state's asymmetrical relations with the US. As a traditional Taiwanese ally, in November 2021, the US explicitly stated that 'Washington wants the country [Honduras] to maintain its long-standing diplomatic relations with Taiwan' (Psaedakis and Spetalnick, 2021). This sentiment was also reflected in the unprecedented attendance of US Vice President, Kamala Harris, at Castro's inauguration ceremony in January 2022 (see Figure 4) (Mandelbaum, 2022). Aside from US demands vis-à-vis the One-China policy, Honduras was also severely hindered by its foreign debt – which increased from 20 billion to 179 billion over the last twelve years (SEDESOL, 2022). To restructure this debt and renegotiate with US multilateral banks, Honduras relied on Washington's support. Tegucigalpa also depended on Taiwan's backing to address its debt in the Central American Integration Bank, of which Taipei is the major partner (with 11.43% of actions) (Moreno, 2022). This suggests that Honduras' debt dependency was simply too great to risk alienating the US (and, to a lesser extent, Taiwan) by pursuing diplomatic relations with China.

Figure 4 - Kamala Harris' Presence at President Castro's Inauguration, January 2022



Source: Borneo Post, 2022.

Furthermore, to counteract Beijing's growing regional influence, Washington has been increasingly explicit in its endeavours to pressure Taipei's allies not to switch recognition. In doing so, it introduced the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement (TAIPEI) Act, which is intended to threaten the reduction of 'economic, security, and diplomatic engagement' with states that undermine Taiwan's 'security or prosperity' (Congress.Gov, 2019). For example, in 2018, the US recalled its diplomats from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Panama following these countries' decision to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing (Reuters, 2018). Therefore, the above evidence would suggest that US offensive measures, as well as Honduras' profound debt, limited Castro's capacity for political manoeuvre vis-à-vis the One-China policy.

This calls into question the extent to which Castro was sovereign in the reversal of her foreign policy endeavours. As previously mentioned, Westphalian sovereignty posits that the state has *absolute* authority - without external interference. However, using the carrot (support for Honduras' debt relief) and stick (TAIPEI Act) approach, the US exercised influence in Honduras' domestic affairs by encouraging the weaker state to comply with US interests. Moon (1983, p.319) points out that, in certain studies pertaining to influence in power relations, there is an implicit assumption that 'there exists some hypothetical counterfactual foreign policy which would be preferred by the weak state in the absence of influence attempts.' He argues that, in the absence of this gap between the actual and hypothetical behaviour of the weaker state, the situation is 'one of consensus, not compliance' (ibid.). While this is true in many cases, the fact that Castro explicitly indicated a desire to establish relations with China throughout the presidential campaign offers a suitable hypothetical foreign policy path from the one she chose following her accession. This would imply that the weaker state experienced external influence in its domestic affairs, namely from the US. Therefore, although Castro retained the legal sovereignty of Honduras, the state's behavioural sovereignty was undermined by US interference in the country's foreign policy decision to maintain relations with Taiwan.

Breaking the Mould

Yet, in a sudden policy (re)reversal, Castro (2023) tweeted on March 15th that Honduras would officially recognise China and cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan 'as a sign of [her] determination to comply with the Government Plan and freely expand the borders in the

concert of the nations of the world.’ This challenges structural assumptions that a weak state’s lack of power in the international system limits it to two options: balancing or bandwagoning. The latter implies succumbing to asymmetrical demands from their great power partners, while the former suggests that weak states must ally with another power through military alliances in exchange for security (Kassab, 2022, p.103). Honduras’ recent foreign policy decision juxtaposes this predicted weak state behaviour as the Central American republic is now involving itself with one of the greatest ‘enemies’ of the US, while simultaneously cooperating with Washington on key regional issues, such as economic development and migration (ibid.).

This shift towards Beijing was justified by Honduras’ government as being guided by ‘pragmatism, not ideology’ (Palencia et al., 2023). According to Foreign Minister Reina, ‘the idea is obviously to search for mechanisms to improve investment, trade, [etc.] If we have risen to power, it is to do good things for Honduras and for that reason, we must look for ways to better benefit the country using all the countries in the world. In this case, China is a reality for us, as we must look for opportunities for the Honduran population’ (The Diplomat, 2023). Indeed, given the weak state’s financial debt and the decline in US aid under the Trump administration, it was becoming increasingly ruinous to isolate Honduras from China, the world’s second-largest economy. Honduras had asked Taiwan to double its annual aid package of \$50 million and realign its debt of \$600 million to Taipei (ibid.). However, when Taiwan rejected this proposal, Honduras turned to the other Asian bidder in the hope of maximising its economic and political gains. This was conveyed in the statement by Reina that the country’s ‘needs are enormous, and we haven’t seen the answer from Taiwan’ (Palencia et al., 2023). As Chapter Two outlined, acting in accordance with the common good is a key requirement for an authority to claim sovereign rights (Ludsin, 2013). This sentiment is reflected in each of the above declarations from government officials. In other words, one could suggest that Honduras was attempting to fulfil its sovereign obligations as- having weighed up the political and economic opportunities of supporting Taipei or Beijing- the weak state chose the most advantageous diplomatic partner to address its socio-economic needs.

Honduras: A Hedger?

In this regard, Castro appears to be pursuing a hedging strategy in the US-China geopolitical rivalry (Myers and Garcia-Herrero, 2023). According to Kuik (2016, p.504), hedging is ‘insurance-seeking behaviour under high-stakes and high-uncertainty situations, where a sovereign actor pursues a bundle of opposite and deliberately ambiguous policies vis-à-vis competing powers to prepare a fallback position should circumstances change.’ Castro’s recent shift towards China reflects such contradictory policies as she is openly embracing the Asian giant in an effort to deepen Chinese trade and investment, while simultaneously pledging – as recently as January 2023 – that she would ‘advance and deepen bilateral relations [with the US] and improve the lives of their peoples through coordinated efforts’ (Embajada de Estados Unidos en Honduras, 2023). This ‘middle-ground position’ could be perceived as an expression of sovereign agency since Honduras is strategically attempting to maximise its returns from both the US and China when their diplomatic relations are positive, while simultaneously seeking to offset potential longer-term risks which could arise from future interactions with the superpowers (Kuik, 2016, p.504).

Furthermore, Honduras’ hedging strategy is notably signalling that it is not beholden to any one country and that it is willing to pursue its own interests – even if that means taking actions which would be considered unfavourable to other countries. This was reflected in an interview with Alejandro Bonilla, a Honduran political analyst, who stated that this foreign policy decision ‘gave a lesson in sovereignty. Honduras is directed under this principle [of sovereignty] to know which country it trades or has diplomatic relations with, without there being any criteria of the empires’ (Linares Petrov, 2023). This aligns with Castro’s overall foreign policy goal to shift away from the country’s former ‘subservient policy, at the mercy of foreign intervention’, and instead revive the Honduran economy by opening up to ‘new, dynamic and more diverse markets’ (Partido Libertad y Refundación Libre, 2021, p.48). By moving away from US interests, Castro’s foreign policy marks a notable difference from that of the former Hernández administration, whereby Honduras’ actions mirrored US interests by rupturing diplomatic relations with Venezuela and expelling Cuban doctors who were working in the country (France 24, 2022). As Chapter Two mentioned, in the post-coup era, the threat of alienating the US was too great to exercise autonomy in such foreign policy decisions. However, in recent years, Chinese competition in the region has allowed for a certain degree of political manoeuvre. Consequently, within the first six months of Castro’s

presidency, the left-wing leader reversed these moves (Palencia et al, 2023). One could, therefore, suggest that Honduras' hedging strategy is an example of weak state agency as the Central American country is maintaining multiple policy options that can be used to offset future potential losses. In doing so, Honduras has the political flexibility to exercise sovereignty in its foreign policy decisions as it is not dependent solely on one actor to ensure its security (as would be the case with balancing or bandwagoning) and can *voluntarily* decide which option, or ally, offers greater benefits to the country's government and the civilian population.

While the Honduran government presented its hedging strategy as a 'historic step in this process of consolidating and strengthening [its] international relations', the decision to establish diplomatic relations with China received mixed reactions among the wider public (Poder Popular, 2023). For example, Juan Carlos Sikaffy, the head of Honduras' business lobby COHEP, expressed concerns that 'while China already accounts for as much as a fifth of Honduran imports - without formal diplomatic ties - U.S. businesses have more to offer' (Garcia, 2021). Furthermore, Graco Pérez, an international law expert, stressed that 'at the beginning, [China] will be very kind [to Honduras], but the experience with other countries is that as time goes by, this relationship is not really beneficial for the country' (Expediente Público, 2023). While the economic aspect of the switch was emphasised at the domestic level, international actors concentrated more on the ideological repercussions of Castro's decision. For example, Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Robert Menendez, tweeted that Honduras must 'be diligent in protecting their sovereignty and human rights even as they deepen relations with one of the world's most autocratic regimes' (The Diplomat, 2023). This was echoed by Senator Bill Cassidy, who warned that Castro is 'moving her country closer to Communist China while the world is moving away. The Honduran people will suffer because of her failed leadership' (ibid).

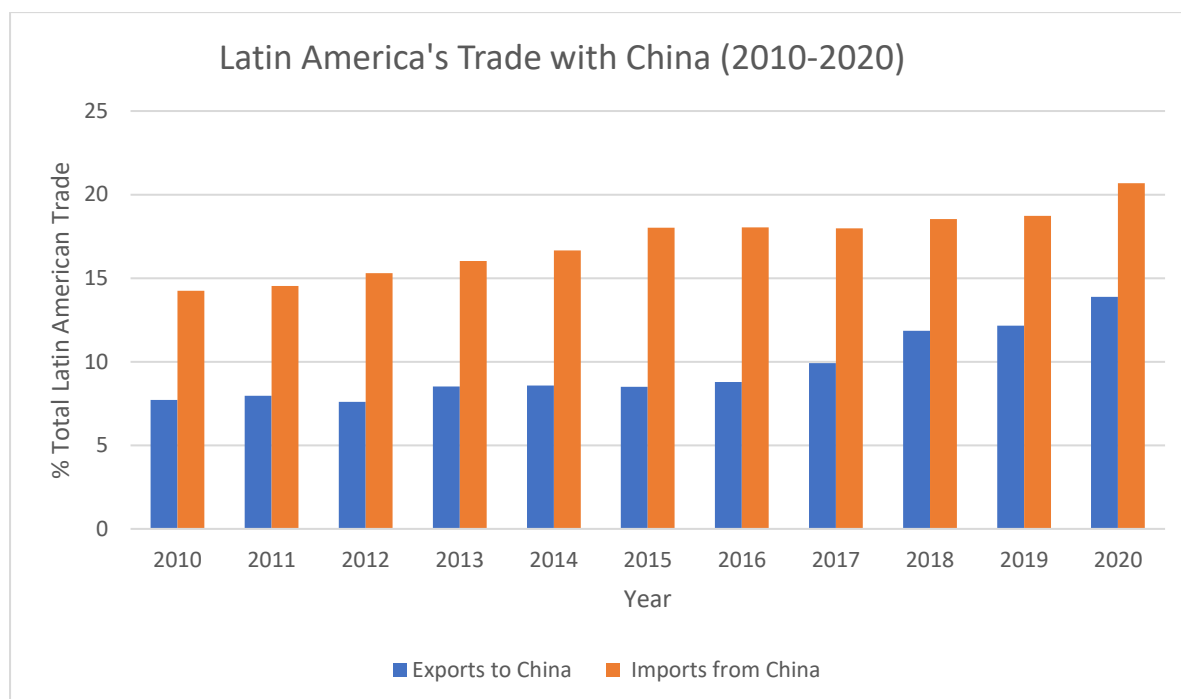
This audacious accusation of 'failed leadership' would imply that Honduras' internal sovereignty is illegitimate. However, just because a state's leader makes an unpopular decision, does that make them any less sovereign? Somek and Wilkinson (2020, p.975) argue that the operational mode of sovereignty is, in itself, paradoxical as it 'does not admit any checks on how the sovereign might go about attaining' the overall objective of ensuring peace and security for the population. In other words, the only 'check' is an actor's failure to perform sovereign duties. In this regard, the legitimacy of a sovereign's decisions comes not

from their popularity, but from their authority to govern and make choices on behalf of their constituents. This echoes Kant's theory that although a 'people' – as united in the civil state – is sovereign, the individual citizens are obliged to obey the elected head of state to represent them and to make both domestic and foreign policy decisions accordingly (Peter, 2017). One could, therefore, suggest that Castro, as the democratically-elected sovereign representative, was asserting Honduras' internal sovereignty as she followed through on her initial electoral promise to recognise China, even if the decision was not welcomed by all.

A New Dependency?

The aforementioned concerns of the general public are rooted in the fear that Honduras would be trading one dependent relationship with another. Chapter Two illustrated how the Central American republic was heavily reliant on US financial assistance to ensure its economic and political survival over the last forty years. Given that Chinese trade with Latin America has increased at a phenomenal annual rate of 31% (which translates into \$450 billion), one could question whether a similar trend is likely to occur with Honduran-Chinese relations (Ezrati, 2022). On a regional level, Jenkins (2012) argues that Latin America relies much more on China as a trade partner than vice versa. For example, in 2020, China represented 13.89% of Latin America's trade, while the region represented only 4.1% of Beijing's commerce (as shown in Figure 5). Furthermore, Latin America's exports to China largely comprise primary products (35%) (WITS, 2021). This contrasts with the region's imports from Beijing, which are centred on manufactured goods. This asymmetrical trade relationship has prompted Latin American countries, such as Brazil, to express concerns that their trade relations with China could result in a repeated historical cycle of commodity dependency (Ferchen, 2022).

Figure 5 - Latin America's Trade with China (2010 – 2020):



Source: WITS Data, 2021.

Furthermore, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been criticised for offering loans that eventually cripple weaker states with unsustainable debt and result in Beijing gaining control of the country's assets (Shullman, 2022). This 'debt-trap diplomacy' prompts a loss of sovereignty as the weaker countries are forced to adjust their national development strategies to meet Chinese requirements. This was the case in Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam- to name but a few (ibid). Having assumed unsustainable debt burdens due to Chinese infrastructure financing deals, these weaker states experience a loss of sovereignty over strategic assets. This was emphasised by Ricardo Ferrer Picado, a strategic security analyst, who claimed that, by engaging with China, Honduras – like other weaker states – risks losing 'the ability to make rational decisions, have a sustainable policy with regard to the environment and social guarantees, and maintain a sovereign economic policy' (Expediente Público, 2023). In other words, while attempting to reap the short-term benefits of increased Chinese trade and investment in the country, Honduras could simultaneously jeopardise its capacity to exercise its sovereignty in future decisions.

However, it must not be forgotten that Honduras can *choose* whether or not to accept Chinese incentives. Having already established that Honduras is, in fact, exercising greater sovereignty by employing a hedging strategy in the US-China geopolitical competition, the weak state has the political flexibility to avoid falling into China's 'debt-trap diplomacy.' Given that it does not display intentions to bandwagon with China, one could presume that Honduras will continue to benefit from US support. This was reflected in the fact that the US Department of State's official declaration in the aftermath of Castro's decision was a warning that China 'often makes promises in exchange for diplomatic recognition that ultimately remain unfulfilled' (AlJazeera, 2023). This vague statement, combined with the unquestioned presence of the US embassy in Tegucigalpa, suggests that Honduras will remain a beneficiary of USAID donations, albeit to a lesser extent, ergo providing the weak state with an alternative source of development investment if the above scenarios were to present themselves in the Honduran context. This was indeed the case for Nicaragua, whereby USAID only dipped slightly from \$27 million in 2020 to \$22 million in 2022 following its diplomatic separation from Taiwan in 2021 (USAID, 2022).

Furthermore, as a sovereign state, Honduras has the power to reverse its decision to recognise China. This was pointed out in an interview with Honduras' national television broadcaster, HCH (2023), which stated that it was within the country's sovereign rights to change its position 'after six months, a year, or five years'. Such 'flip-flop diplomacy' was previously employed by Nauru and Saint Lucia, both of which re-established diplomatic relations with Taiwan after three and ten years, respectively (Rich, 2009). This once again illustrates how these weaker states can – and do – innovatively exercise agency within great power competitions. The ability of a sovereign state to choose the company that it keeps is one of Miller's (1986, p.81) key rationales for why sovereignty provides vitality i.e., 'the opportunities which political units need in order to sustain their position.' Therefore, one could argue that, by establishing diplomatic relations with China, Honduras is significantly enhancing the 'vitality' of its sovereignty.

In conclusion, this chapter used the lens of sovereignty to examine Honduras' recent foreign policy developments. In doing so, it argued that the Central American republic is exercising its sovereign agency by pursuing a hedging strategy amid increasing geopolitical competition between the US and China. While the chapter's first section indicated that Honduras' sovereign 'vitality' vis-à-vis the One-China policy was initially hindered by US influence,

Castro's foreign policy shift in March reflects a notable reversal of this trend. In other words, the decision to move Honduras' foreign policy away from US interests forms part of the country's broader desire to assume a 'middle-ground' position in the US-China dispute and, in turn, exercise greater sovereignty in the ever-changing international environment.

CONCLUSION

In exploring the extent to which weak states are sovereign in their foreign policy decisions, this thesis has shown the need to counter the dominant IR narrative, whereby weak actors are presented as pawns in the international system. By illustrating the oft-overlooked agency of weak states, the foregoing analysis simultaneously underscored the complex nature of sovereignty in the contemporary global context. Therefore, the conclusions that can be drawn from this study depend largely on how one interprets the increasingly contested concept of sovereignty.

Indeed, if subscribing to the traditional understanding of sovereignty as ‘absolute’, Honduras’ ability to exercise sovereignty in its foreign policy decisions has been significantly hindered by structural factors associated with its inherent weaknesses. As Chapter Two highlighted, in the 1980s, Honduras’ external sovereignty was undermined by the US’ economic and military interference, while its internal sovereignty was ceded to General Álvarez. The ‘absoluteness’ of the weak state’s sovereignty was further eroded in the 1990s when the country embraced multilateralism to gain access to the global market. Moreover, Chapter Three indicated that, due to the socioeconomic instability prompted by the 2009 coup, Castro was structurally obliged to abandon her electoral promise and comply with US demands to continue recognising Taiwan. The common thread binding these four decades of Honduran foreign policy together is that external actors have played a prominent role in the weak state due to its precarious economic and political position on the international stage. Therefore, if analysing the above events through the conventional lens of sovereignty, whereby the power of a state is indivisible, one could suggest that absolute sovereignty is a luxury that weak states, such as Honduras, simply cannot afford. In other words, their reliance on external actors for survival restricts the extent to which they can exercise sovereignty in their foreign policy decisions.

However, in the contemporary era of enhanced supranationalism and advanced globalisation, one could argue that every state – both weak and powerful alike – must cede a certain amount of its sovereignty to foreign actors in order to adapt to the interconnected global environment. By moving beyond the binary confines of equating sovereignty with ‘autonomy’, the foregoing analysis indicates that, despite its lack of material capacity, Honduras has, in fact,

exercised sovereignty by pursuing foreign policy initiatives that act in accordance with the common good. In Chapter Two, the Central American republic cooperated with both state and non-state actors as a means of strategically addressing its economic and security weaknesses, ergo leveraging its influence on the international stage. Honduras' practice of sovereign agency is perhaps most pronounced in Castro's recent decision to establish diplomatic relations with China. In doing so, the weak state is shrewdly employing a hedging strategy by assuming a 'middle-ground' position amid US-China hostilities. Moreover, cutting ties with Taiwan could be interpreted as an expression of external sovereignty since Honduras is gradually shifting away from US interests. This demonstrates that the weak state is not beholden to any one country and can independently pursue its national priorities.

While its recent shift towards Beijing indicates a far greater exercise of agency, the overall trajectory of Honduras' foreign policy decisions suggests that weak states do, in fact, exercise differing degrees of sovereignty over time, depending on internal and external factors. This highlights the complexity of weak state sovereignty in an ever-changing global environment and also prompts a reflection on the correlation between a lack of sovereignty and weak states. Although they are distinct concepts, they are often treated synonymously. As the preceding analysis illustrated, Honduras' structural and material weaknesses made it susceptible to, if not reliant on, external influence - predominantly from the US. To address these challenges, the weak state exchanged a certain degree of its sovereignty for economic and military support, further reducing its autonomy to pursue its national interests. This creates a recurrent cycle where one aspect exacerbates the other. However, while the concepts are indeed related, weak states and lack of sovereignty can – and should – be treated separately. A state's weakness can emerge from economic instability, domestic conflicts or inadequate governance, despite exercising a high level of sovereignty. In contrast, although certain states lack sovereignty, it does not automatically imply that they are profoundly weak. The very fact that Taiwan continues to play a role on the international stage, despite only thirteen states recognising it as a sovereign entity, indicates that the degree of sovereignty exercised should not be perceived as an exclusively accurate reflection of a political entity's influence, strength, or resilience in the international system.

In light of the above analysis, this thesis has ultimately ascertained that *narrative* plays a crucial role in determining whether weak states are pawns or players. As Chapter One highlighted, traditional IR scholarship routinely overlooks the capacity of weak states to

exercise sovereignty. By allowing a weak state to be the protagonist, this study has shown that, while they may face significant structural challenges, weak states are by no means powerless pawns in the international arena. This suggests that there is a profound link between structure and agency underpinning weak state behaviour, whereby the weaker actor's capacity to practise sovereignty is contingent on systemic dynamics. This is reflected in Castro's recent decision to establish diplomatic relations with China. Her foreign policy manoeuvre in March 2023 was the result of a culmination of systemic factors, such as China's growing regional presence and the decline in Honduran aid receipts under the Trump administration. These external influences ultimately enabled the weaker state to exercise greater sovereignty by altering its foreign policy to maximise its economic, political, and security gains. In other words, by interpreting and responding to structural constraints, weak states can exercise agency to advance their interests and navigate the international system. Recognising this underappreciated capacity of weak states to practise varying degrees of sovereignty allows both scholars and policymakers alike to better understand the dynamics of contemporary global politics, whereby weak states, such as Honduras, are increasingly becoming players on the world stage.

REFERENCES

ACAPS. 2023. *Central America: Complex crises and migration in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua*. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/el-salvador/acaps-thematic-report-central-america-complex-crises-and-migration-el-salvador-guatemala-honduras-and-nicaragua> [Accessed: 08 May 2023].

Al Jazeera. 2023. *Honduras cuts ties with Taiwan, opens relations with China*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/26/honduras-cuts-diplomatic-ties-with-taiwan> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].

Associated Press News. 2022. *Gobierno Hondureño cambia postura sobre relación con China*. Available at: <https://apnews.com/6cfbae9cfd77cddb82332f720c83804f> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].

Barston, R.P. 1973. *The Other Powers: Studies in the Foreign Policies of Small States*. Crows Nest, Australia: George Allen & Unwind.

Benedict, B. 1967. *Problems of Smaller Territories*. London: Athlone Press.

Bjol, E. 1971. 'The Small State in International Politics', in Schou A. and Brundland, A.O. *Small States in International Relations*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell, pp. 32-4.

Bodin, Jean. 1962. *The Six Books of a Commonwealth. A Facsimile reprint of the English translation of 1606*. Ed. Kenneth Douglas McRae. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bull, H. 1977. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Casas-Zamora, K. 2017. Notes on Costa Rica's switch from Taipei to Beijing. *Brookings*. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/notes-on-costa-ricas-switch-from-taipei-to-beijing/> [Accessed: February 23, 2023].

Castro, X. 2023. [Twitter] 15 March. Available at: <https://twitter.com/XiomaraCastroZ/status/1635780945096704000> [Accessed April 10, 2023].

Centro de Información sobre Desastres y Salud. 1985. *Agriculture*. Available at: <http://cidbimena.desastres.hn/pdf/eng/doc1093/doc1093-7.pdf> [Accessed: March 23, 2023].

Chocano, G.M. 1990. "Honduras: Crisis Económica, Elecciones y Sistema Político (1980-1990)," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 52(4), pp. 301-314.

Congress.Gov. 2019. *Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019*. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1678/text> [Accessed: April 7, 2023].

De Soysa, I. 2017. "Proxy wars: Implications of great-power rivalry for the onset and duration of Civil War," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.526>. [Accessed: 21 February 2023].

- Desch, M.C. 1996. ‘War and strong states, peace and weak states?’, *International Organization*, 50(2), pp. 237–268.
- Dunkerley, J. 1993. *The Pacification of Central America*. London: University of London, pp. 10–57.
- Efremova, K. 2019. Small States in Great Power Politics. Understanding the “Buffer Effect”. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 13(1), pp.100–121.
- Eguizábal, C. and Rojas Aravena, F. 2011. “Política exterior, Negociación y Procesos de Decisión en Centroamérica: Elementos para una aproximación,” *Estudios Internacionales*, 22(88), pp. 65–80.
- Eguizábal, C., Espinoza, A.Y. and Benavides, T. 2017. *La Paz en Centroamérica, 1987-1990: El plan arias desde adentro*. Mérida: Centro Extremeño de Estudios y Cooperación con Iberoamérica.
- El Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía. 1985. *La Mortalidad Infantil en Honduras*. Available at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/8393/S8500110_es.pdf;sequence=1 [Accessed: March 26, 2023].
- Embajada de Estados Unidos en Honduras. 2023. *Declaración conjunta de Estados Unidos y honduras de diálogos estratégico y sobre derechos humanos*. Available at: <https://hn.usembassy.gov/es/declaracion-conjunta-sobre-los-dialogos-estrategico-y-sobre-derechos-humanos-entre-estados-unidos-y-honduras/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Ernest, J. 2021. Honduras evalúa sus vínculos internacionales tras la victoria de Castro. *Dialogo Chino*. Available at: <https://dialogochino.net/es/comercio-y-inversiones-es/49364-honduras-evalua-sus-vinculos-internacionales-tras-la-victoria-de-castro/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Eun, Y.-S., Acharya, A. and na Thalang, C. 2021. “Unpacking the dynamics of weak states’ agency,” *The Pacific Review*, 35(2), pp. 229–244.
- Expediente Público. 2023. *Honduras "Se vende al mejor postor" Al romper con Taiwán*. Available at: <https://www.expedientepublico.org/honduras-se-vende-al-mejor-postor-al-romper-con-taiwan-y-preferir-a-china/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Ezrati, M. 2022. China’s Latin America Move. *Forbes*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/miltonezrati/2022/11/07/chinas-latin-america-move/> [Accessed: 09 May 2023].
- Farah, D. and Yates, C. 2020. “Great Power Competition in Latin America: A New Normal,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 44(2), pp. 45–64.
- Ferchen, M. 2020. How China is Reshaping International Development. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/01/08/how-china-is-reshaping-international-development-pub-80703> [Accessed: April 12, 2023].

- Fox, A. B. 1958. *The Power of Small States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- France 24. 2022. *Honduras restablece relaciones con Venezuela y las mantiene Con Taiwán*. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20220204-honduras-restablece-relaciones-con-venezuela-y-las-mantiene-con-taiw%C3%A1n> [Accessed: April 7, 2023].
- Fund for Peace. 2023. *Fragile States Index*. Available at: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/> [Accessed: February 23, 2023].
- Garcia, D.A. 2021. Analysis: United States, China Tussle over Honduras as it weighs Taiwan ties. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/united-states-china-tussle-over-honduras-it-weighs-taiwan-ties-2021-11-26/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- García, Y. 2023. ¿Qué ganaría Honduras con su acercamiento a China? *Voz de América*. Available at: <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/beneficios-honduras-acercamiento-a-china-/7024258.html> [Accessed: April 7, 2023].
- Gross, L. 1984. 'The Peace of Westphalia, 1648–1948', *Essays on International Law and Organization*, pp. 3–21.
- Handel, M.I. 1990. *Weak states in the international system*. London: Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- HCH Televisión Digital. 2023. *Inicio de relaciones entre Honduras y la República Popular China "revuelve el avispero"*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBJEoDNsjZU> [Accessed: May 3, 2023].
- Hinsley, F.H. 1986. *Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hobbes, T. 2020. *Leviathan*. Durham: Duke Classics.
- Hoffman, J., & Graham, P. 2006. *Introduction to Political Concepts*. England: Pearson Educational Limited.
- Hsieh, P. 2009. "The Taiwan Question and the One-China Policy: Legal Challenges with Renewed Momentum," *Die Friedens-Warte*, 84(3), pp. 59–81.
- Human Rights Watch. 2022. *World Report 2022: Rights trends in Honduras*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/honduras> [Accessed: February 23, 2023].
- Johnston, J. 2017. How Pentagon officials may have encouraged a 2009 coup in Honduras. *The Intercept*. Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2017/08/29/honduras-coup-us-defense-department-center-hemispheric-defense-studies-chds/> [Accessed: March 31, 2023].
- Jue, S. 2005. "The 'One China' Policy: Terms of Art," *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 12(2), pp. 159–168.
- Kassab, H.S. 2022. *Weak states as spheres of Great Power Competition*. London: Routledge.
- Keohane, R.O. 1969. "Lilliputians' dilemmas: Small states in International Politics," *International Organization*, 23(2), pp. 291–310.

- Knudsen, O.F. 2002. "Small States, Latent and Extant: Towards a General Perspective." *Journal of International Relations and Development*. 5(2), pp.182–198.
- Krasner, S.D. 1999. *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Krasner, S.D. 2001. "Abiding Sovereignty", *International Political Science Review*, 22(3): 229-251.
- Krasner, S.D. 2009. Think again: Sovereignty. *Foreign Policy*. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/20/think-again-sovereignty/> [Accessed February 16, 2023].
- Krause, V. and Singer, J.D. 2001. Minor powers, alliances, and armed conflicts: Some preliminary patterns. In: E. Reiter and H. Gartner (eds.) *Small States and Alliances*. New York: Springer, pp. 15–25
- Lafeber, W. 1984. "The Reagan Administration and Revolutions in Central America," *Political Science Quarterly*, 99(1), pp. 1–25.
- Lake, D. 2003. The New Sovereignty in International Relations. *International Studies Review*, 303-323.
- Lima, L. 2022. Xiomara Castro: 4 retos Que enfrenta La Nueva Presidenta de Honduras. *BBC News Mundo*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-60149354> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].
- Linares Petrov, L. 2023. Relations with China: Sovereign decision of Honduras. *Prensa Latina*. Available at: <https://www.plenglish.com/news/2023/03/28/relations-with-china-sovereign-decision-of-honduras/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Lindell, U. and Persson, S. 1986. "The paradox of weak state power: A research and literature overview," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 21(2), pp. 79–97.
- Lobell, S.E. 2009. Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy. In: S.E. Lobell, N.M Ripsman and Taliaferro J.W., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 42–75.
- Long, T. 2015. *Latin America confronts the United States: Asymmetry and influence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Long, T. 2022. *A small state's guide to influence in world politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Long, T. and Urdinez, F., 2020. "Status at the margins: Why Paraguay recognizes Taiwan and shuns China," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(1).
- Lucas, P., Fleming, J. and Bhosale, J. 2018. 'The utility of case study as a methodology for work-integrated learning research', *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 19(3), pp. 215–222.

- Ludsin, H. 2013. "Returning Sovereignty to the People," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transitional Law*, 46(1), pp. 97–169.
- Mandelbaum, H.G. 2022. Xiomara Castro, China, and the future of Honduras-Taiwan relations. *Center for International Studies and Analysis*. Available at: <https://neai-unesp.org/xiomara-castro-china-and-the-future-of-honduras-taiwan-relations/> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].
- Marston, H. and Ramesh, A. 2021. Great Power Competition and small state leverage in the Indo-Pacific. *East Asia Forum*. Available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/09/16/great-power-competition-and-small-state-leverage-in-the-indo-pacific/> [Accessed: February 21, 2023].
- Mathieu, E. 2020. Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccinations. *Our World in Data*. Available at: https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=OWID_WRL [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Menchu, S. 2017. Taiwan's Central American allies coy on Panama's Beijing embrace. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-panama-china-centralamerica/taiwans-central-american-allies-coy-on-panamas-beijing-embrace-idUSKBN1942P9> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Merrill, T. 1995. *Honduras: a country study*. DA, Pam: Library of Congress.
- Meza, V. 1988. The Military: Willing to Deal. *NACLA*. Available at: https://nacla.org/sites/default/files/articles/A02201016_1.pdf [Accessed: April 7, 2023].
- Middlebrook, K.J. and Rico, C. 1988. *The United States and Latin America in the 1980s: Contending perspectives on a decade of crisis*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Miller, J.D. 1986. "Sovereignty as a source of vitality for the State," *Review of International Studies*, 12(2), pp. 79–89.
- Moon, B.E. 1983. "The foreign policy of the Dependent State," *International Studies Quarterly*, 27(3), pp. 315–340.
- Moreno, J. 2022. Lo que Honduras espera de la apuesta por EE.UU y Taiwán, no por China. *Voz de América*. Available at: <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/honduras-eeuu-taiwan-china-xiomara-castro/6414157.html> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].
- Morgenthau, H.J. 1948. *Politics among nations*. New York: Knopf.
- Myers, M. and Garcia-Herrero, A. 2023. What will Honduras gain by establishing ties with China? *The Dialogue*. Available at: <https://www.thedialogue.org/analysis/what-will-honduras-gain-by-establishing-ties-with-china/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- O Henry. 1904. *Cabbages and kings*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company.

- OAS. 2009. *OAS Suspends Membership of Honduras*. Available at: https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-032/20/ [Accessed: April 7, 2023].
- Ojeda, M. 2007. *Retrospección de Contadora: Los Esfuerzos de México para la paz en centroamérica (1983-1985)*. México, D.F: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Internacionales.
- Palencia, G., Woodford, I. and Kinosian, S. 2023. Debts and investment spur Honduran change of allegiance to China. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/honduras-decision-open-ties-with-china-about-pragmatism-not-ideology-minister-2023-03-15/> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].
- Palmer, G. and Morgan, T.C. 2011. *Theory of Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Partido Libertad y Refundación Libre. 2021. *Plan de Gobierno para Refundar Honduras 2022-2026 de Honduras*. Available at: https://observatorioplanificacion.cepal.org/sites/default/files/plan/files/PLAN-DE-GOBIERNO-XIOMARA-CASTRO_0.pdf [Accessed 6 May 2023].
- Paz Aguilar, E. 1983. Evolución reciente de la política exterior de Honduras: balance y perspectivas. *Relaciones Internacionales*, 6(1), pp. 123-130.
- Peter, F. 2017. Political legitimacy. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legitimacy/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Phillips, J.J. 2017. *Honduras in dangerous times: Resistance and resilience*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Philpott, D. 1995. "Sovereignty: An Introduction and Brief History," *Journal of International Affairs*, 48(2), pp. 353–368.
- Poder Popular. 2023. *Xi Jinping invita a Xiomara a China*. Available at: <https://www.poderpopular.hn/secciones/documentos/PP45edicion.pdf> [Accessed: May 4, 2023].
- Portada, R., Lem, S. and Paudel, U. 2020. The Final Frontier: China, Taiwan, and the United States in Strategic Competition for Central America. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*. 25(4), pp.551-573.
- Psaledakis, D. and Spetalnick, M. 2021. U.S. urged Honduran presidential candidates to keep ties with Taiwan. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-has-urged-honduran-presidential-candidates-keep-ties-with-taiwan-official-2021-11-24/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Reuters. 2018. *U.S. recalls diplomats in El Salvador, Panama, Dominican Republic over Taiwan*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-taiwan-idUSKCN1LO00N> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].

- Rice, S. and Patrick, S. 2008. Index of State Weakness In the Developing World. *Brookings Institute*. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror_chapter.pdf [Accessed: February 17, 2023].
- Rich, T., 2009. “Status for Sale: Taiwan and the Competition for Diplomatic Recognition.” *Issues & Studies* 45 (4): 159–88.
- Rosenau, J.N. 1980. *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy*. Frances Pinter: London, pp. 29-30.
- Rosenberg, M. and Palencia, G. 2018. Trump administration moves to expel some 57,000 Hondurans. *Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-immigration-honduras-idUKKBN1I52DS> [Accessed: March 20, 2023].
- Roskin, Cord, Medeiros, & Jones. 2003. *Political Science: An Introduction*. Boston: Longman.
- Rothstein, R.L. 1968. *Alliances and Small Powers*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ruhl, M. 1996. “Redefining civil-military relations in Honduras,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 38(1), pp. 33–66.
- Salomón, L.1994. *Política y Militares en Honduras*. Tegucigalpa: Centro de Documentación de Honduras.
- Sanford, J. 1989. *Central America: Major Trends in U.S. Foreign Assistance Fiscal 1978 to Fiscal 1990, Congressional Research Service*. Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pcaaa484.pdf [Accessed: March 23, 2023].
- Schulz, D. 2018. *The United States, Honduras, And The Crisis In Central America*. New York: Routledge.
- Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y Cooperación Internacional. 2023 (a). *Honduras y China inician primeras conversaciones para establecer sus relaciones diplomáticas*. Available at: <https://sreci.gob.hn/node/1172> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y Cooperación Internacional. 2023 (b). *Honduras Anuncia Ruptura de Relaciones Diplomáticas con Taiwán*. Available at: <https://sreci.gob.hn/node/1172> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- SEDESOL. 2022. *Discurso de Toma de posesión de la Presidenta Xiomara Castro*. Available at: <https://sedesol.gob.hn/discurso-de-toma-de-posesion-de-la-presidenta-xiomara-castro/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].
- Selser, G. 1984. “Honduras: De República Bananera a enclave militar (1980-1984),” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 46(3), pp. 241 – 269.
- Sharman, Jason C. 2017. “Sovereignty at the Extremes: Micro-States in World Politics.” *Political Studies*, 65(3), pp.559–75.

Shattuck, T. 2020. The Race to Zero? China's Poaching of Taiwan's Diplomatic Allies. *Orbis*, 64(2), pp.334-352.

Shepherd, P. 1984. "The Tragic Course and Consequences of U.S. Policy in Honduras," *World Policy Journal*, 2(1), pp. 109–154.

Shullman, D.O. 2022. Protect the party: China's growing influence in the developing world. *Brookings*. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/protect-the-party-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-developing-world/> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].

Singer, M. 1972. *Weak States in a World of Power: The Dynamics of International Relationships*. New York: Free Press.

Somek, A. and Wilkinson, M. 2020. "Unpopular Sovereignty?" *Modern Law Review*, 83(5), pp. 955–978.

Sosa Iglesias, E. 2017. "Transformaciones en las élites económicas, Estado y el proceso de democratización y desdemocratización: El Caso de Honduras, 1990-2017," *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, 43, pp. 125 -140.

Statista. 2022. *Leading Trade Partners of Honduras 2021*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1184918/value-trade-honduras-countries/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].

Steinberg, R. 2004. "Who is Sovereign?", *Stanford Journal of International Law*, 40(1), pp. 329–347.

Strong, M. 2020. Taiwan donates to 3 Central American allies hit by Hurricane Eta. *Taiwan News*. Available at: <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4047067> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].

Taipei Times. 2022. *US pick for envoy to Honduras vows support for Taipei*. Available at: <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/02/10/2003772880> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].

The Borneo Post. 2022. *Xiomara Castro becomes first woman president of Honduras*. Available at: <https://www.theborneopost.com/2022/01/28/xiomara-castro-becomes-first-woman-president-of-honduras/> [Accessed: 10 May 2023].

The Diplomat. 2023. *Honduras' turn toward China sparks debate*. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/04/honduras-turn-toward-china-sparks-debate/> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].

The Economist. 2011. *Why a pariah may return*. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2011/03/10/why-a-pariah-may-return> [Accessed: March 16, 2023].

Torres Calderón, M. 1985. "La Influencia de Estados Unidos en la Formulación de la Política Exterior de Honduras," *Boletín Informativo Honduras*. Available at: http://www.cedoh.org/Biblioteca_CEDOH/archivos/001015CEDOH%20BOLETIN%20ESPECIAL%20MARZO%20%201985%20No%2016.pdf [Accessed: May 7, 2023].

Torres Calderón, M. 2002. *Dos décadas de periodismo Hondureño por dentro*. Tegucigalpa: CEDOH.

Transparency International. 2022. *2021 corruption perceptions index*. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/hnd> [Accessed: February 23, 2023].

Tribunal Superior de Cuentas. 1982. *Constitución de la República de Honduras*. Available at: <https://www.tsc.gob.hn/biblioteca/index.php/leyes/177-constitucion-de-la-republica-de-honduras> [Accessed: March 13, 2023].

United Nations. 2022. *La presidenta de honduras asegura que las naciones pobres del mundo ya no soportan Golpes de Estado*. Available at: <https://news.un.org/es/story/2022/09/1514871> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].

US Committee on Foreign Affairs. 1982. *Honduras and U.S. policy: An emerging dilemma*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O. (11-2880).

US Department of State. 2019. *Voting Practices in the United Nations in 2018*. Available at: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Voting-Practices-in-the-United-Nations_2018.pdf [Accessed: 17 March 2023].

USAID. 2022. *Nicaragua*. Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/nicaragua> [Accessed: May 5, 2023].

Vital, D. 1967. *The Inequality of States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Walt, S. 1987. *The Origin of Alliances*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

WITS Data. 2021. *Latin America & Caribbean product exports and imports to China*. Available at: <https://wits.worldbank.org//CountryProfile/en/Country/LCN/Year/2020/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/CHN/Product/all-groups> [Accessed: April 12, 2023].

World Bank. 2023. *Honduras Overview*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras/overview> [Accessed: April 6, 2023].

Yin, R. 2014. *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yoo, J.C. 2010. "Fixing failed states," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, pp. 95–150.

Zuleta, P. 2020. How Latin America can make the most of the US-China competition. *The Diplomat*. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/how-latin-america-can-make-the-most-of-the-us-china-competition/> [Accessed: February 21, 2023].