

Islands of democracy: Land borders and military regimes¹

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Abstract

This paper proposes a novel theory of how structural geographic factors such as insularity and the absence of land borders affect the probability of developing military regimes. According to it, island countries are less likely to have military regimes because, having little or no land contiguity, they have fewer external threats in general, and even fewer external land threats, so they not only have incentives to invest less than the mainland countries in their Armed Forces in general, but even less in that key branch for internal involvement, the Army. Thus, their Armed Forces are in a much weaker position to establish and sustain military regimes when incentives to do so arise. To empirically support this theory, logistic regression models are developed that show, with a confidence level of 99.9%, that the probability of having a military dictatorship is lower if one is an island country and if one has no land borders than in the opposite cases. Likewise, the research shows descriptive evidence that is consistent with the causal mechanism it defends. This paper innovates not only by incorporating the influence of the ultimate factor of geography in the causes of the establishment and survival of military regimes, but also by disaggregating the Armed Forces actor, which is usually taken as monolithic in the specialized literature.

Keywords: *Insularity, Islands, Geography, Land Borders, External Threats, Armed Forces, Army, Military Regimes, Democracy.*

¹ This writing sample is a translated summary of the thesis I presented to earn my International Studies Diploma in June of 2022 which was graded with the maximum qualification available.

1. Introduction

It is well known that island states have higher levels of democracy than mainland states. Different scholars elaborated several explanations of why this is so (Anckar, 2002a, 2002b, 2008; Clague *et al.*, 2001; Hadenius, 1992; Veenendaal, 2020). However, another correlation between island countries and political regime types has been little noted in the literature and may explain much of the above statement. Island states have had much fewer military regimes than mainland states. The present research suggests that a significant part of the correlation between insularity and democracy is actually a spurious product of the correlation of the former with the absence of military regimes and that both should be explained independently since they are the result of different dynamics. Thus, this paper will focus on explaining the second of these relationships: why do island countries have had fewer military regimes?

In 1978, Gourevitch published *The second image reversed*, an essay on how international factors can affect domestic politics. In that essay, the author argues that the form of political organization of countries is determined in response to the external threats to which they are subject. Hintze (1975) puts it this way:

All state organization was originally military organization, organization for war (Hintze, 1975, p. 181). The form and spirit of the state's organization will not be determined solely by economic and social relations and clashes of interests, but primarily by the necessities of defense and offense, that is, by the organization of the army and of warfare (Hintze, 1975, p. 202).

Gourevitch (1978) exemplifies this thesis by comparing the geographies and political trajectories of Prussia and Great Britain. While the only obstacles that separated Prussia from

its enemies were easily avoidable rivers, Great Britain was surrounded by water, an important natural barrier against external threats. Strongly threatened by their neighbors, the Prussian states had incentives to form strong and autonomous Armed Forces to protect themselves. This increased the political power of the Prussian Armed Forces, boosting their authoritarian tendencies and leading to the classic example of a militarist state, where the entire social system revolved around the Armed Forces (Hintze, 1975).

Conversely, the insular character of Great Britain led it to form one of the most powerful navies in the world, but which, however, lacked the capacity to internally repress as a result of its own nature. The early democratic development of Great Britain, according to Gourevitch (1978), is thus explained by the lack of capacity of the Armed Forces to get involved in internal politics. Thus, the geography of the countries would affect the position of the Armed Forces in the domestic regime and, therefore, the probability of the emergence of military regimes.

This paper takes this idea from Gourevitch (1978) and studies its validity in the aftermath of World War II. Specifically, this research argues that insularity makes countries less likely to suffer military regimes because there are geographic determinants on islands that make them have fewer incentives to form more powerful Armed Forces and, therefore, with more opportunities to establish military regimes. This happens in two ways. First, having little or no land contiguity with other countries makes external threats and opportunities for conflict comparatively much lower, so island countries are expected to invest less than mainland countries in their Armed Forces in general. Secondly, the same geographical characteristics mean that, when external threats do exist, they are not of a land-based nature, but mostly maritime or airborne. This creates incentives for investment in the Armed Forces to focus less

on its land branch, the Army, which has a greater capacity for internal repression. Thus, weaker Armed Forces, with even weaker Armies, have fewer opportunities to install and sustain military regimes.

This paper is organized as follows: the next section deals with the theoretical framework, addressing the different fragments of the specialized literature that can be associated with this research. Subsequently, the main argument of the study and the hypothesis to be tested are presented. Later, the method for testing the hypothesis is presented together with the data used. Next, the results of the models developed to test the hypotheses are shown and interpreted. Finally, it concludes by pointing out the contributions of the study and leaving open potential research questions for future work in this line.

2. Theoretical Framework

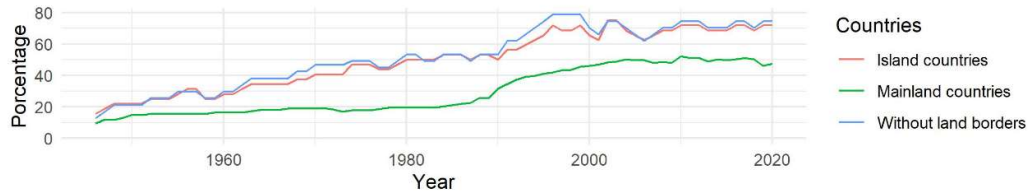
2.1 Islands and democracy

To address the relationship between insularity and military regimes, it is necessary to look at the causal relationships that other authors have established between insularity and other types of political regimes, in this case, democracy. Island countries have higher levels of democracy than mainland countries (Figure 1²). Numerous authors have given different explanations as to why this relationship is due (Ankar, 2002a, 2002b, 2008; Clague *et al.*, 2001; Hadenius, 1992; Veenendaal, 2020). The first to do so was Hadenius (1992) in his book *Democracy and*

² All data in this study is presented for three different groups of countries. Island countries are those “*States that are islands or parts of an island or consist of islands and parts of islands*” (Ankar, 1996, p. 702), with an island being understood as any portion of sub-continental land surrounded by water (Ankar, 1996). Mainland countries are all those states that do not meet the definition of island countries, these two categories being exclusive. Countries without land borders are all those states that are entirely surrounded by water. This last definition includes another more extreme conceptualization of insularity (Clague *et al.*, 2001) that is expected to be more consistent with our hypothesis and causal mechanism.

Development, which relates the high levels of democracy in the island countries to the predominance of Protestantism in their societies. Several studies associate Protestantism, as opposed to Catholicism or other religious variants, with higher levels of democracy (Bruce, 2004; Woodberry and Shah, 2004).

Figure 1. Percentage of democracies by groups of countries



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from Lührmann et al. (2018) and Coppedge et al. (2021).

High levels of Protestantism in these countries often derive from the British colonization legacy. There is a very high correlation between being an island country and having been colonized by the United Kingdom (Ankar, 2008). While the number of former British colonies in the period studied, taken as countries that gained independence from the British Empire according to Hensel and Mitchell (2007b), exceeds 50% both in the case of countries without land borders and in the case of island countries, in the case of mainland countries this number is very slightly above 20% (Table 1). This is due to the fact that, during the peak period of imperialism and colonization, the British Empire was also the one with the most powerful navy in the world (Gourevitch, 1978) and, therefore, the one with the most facilities to colonize island territories (Baxter, 1939).

Table 1. Insularity and British colonization

	Without land borders	Island countries	Mainland countries
No former British colonies	17 (42.5%)	24 (47.06%)	121 (79.08%)
Former British colonies	23 (57.5%)	27 (52.94%)	32 (20.92%)
Total	40	51	153

Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from Hensel and Mitchell (2007b).

There are three main mechanisms through which this past colonization experience could continue to affect the countries' levels of democracy. The first is that of cultural change. The metropolises, either through force or persuasion, tended to make the population of their colonies convert to the religion of their colonizers, adopt their customs and incorporate their values. The United Kingdom spread Christianity, particularly Protestantism, and imposed its customs and values in all those territories it dominated (Anckar, 2008; Hadenius, 1992).

The second mechanism is that of the institutional legacy. Apart from spreading their culture, the colonizers also imposed the institutional forms through which the locals were to organize themselves. Institutional designs, once consolidated, tend to perpetuate themselves and are difficult to change. That the British Empire imposed more democratic institutions on its colonies than other empires was key to the future democratic performance of nations once they became independent (Clague *et al.*, 2001; Veenendaal, 2020; Wejnert, 2005). Apart from this, the independence of the island countries tended to be late and peaceful, which meant that the critical junctures as opportunities to reform these colonial institutions were reduced (Veenendaal, 2020).

The third mechanism works through the networks of international cooperation maintained by the former empires with their former colonies. Wejnert (2005) recounts how the British Empire, prior to withdrawing from its colonies, left in place representative forms of

government and formed spaces for international cooperation such as the Commonwealth to maintain its networks of influence. If one finds oneself within networks where democratic forms are more valued, the costs of deviating from democratic institutionality are higher (Pevehouse, 2005).

Contrary to the abovementioned, Anckar (2002a, 2002b) argues that neither modernization theories nor those that refer to the colonial legacy are able to fully explain the phenomenon of the extraordinary levels of democracy in small island countries. He argues that island countries are more democratic because of their size. Island countries tend to be small, generally because of the limitations of their geography. Mainland countries have, on average, over twice as many km² as island countries and countries without land borders, figures that increase significantly when we take group medians as an indicator (Haber and Menaldo, 2011; Weidmann *et al.*, 2010). As Alesina and Spolaore (2005) explain, countries tend to be geographically compact, as there are not only administrative costs of having disjoint territories, but also coordination of preferences becomes more costly as those living farther away from each other tend to have greater differences in their preferences.

This homogeneity of preferences in small countries is what, Alesina and Spolaore (2005) argue, makes them more likely to have higher levels of democracy because facilitates higher levels of agreement among citizens dissuading authoritarian preferences that different groups may have. The authors explain that the preferences of people who are geographically close tend to resemble each other for three related reasons. First, individuals with similar attitudes, ideologies, preferences, income, religion, and race tend to live near one another. Second, centuries of geographic proximity, along with the common language that derives from it, tend

to generate a greater uniformity of beliefs and preferences. Third, the degrees of homogeneity can also be influenced by explicit political decisions. National governments tend to carry out policies to increase cultural homogeneity. All this means that geographic proximity and preferences are positively correlated. In short, if the small size of the countries makes their citizens live closer to each other, then it will also make their preferences similar, making democratic adventures more likely to succeed.

Other explanations, also focused on the consequences of the small size of the countries, claim that the remoteness and geographic isolation of islands enhance the effects generated by smallness. Anckar (2008) argues that small communities generate greater feelings of empathy and cohesion, which in the case of islands are enhanced by their remoteness and isolation. Citizens share both the problems that stem from smallness and those that stem from isolation. Anckar (2002a, 2002b) puts forward four propositions to explain democracy in small island countries: i) small and remote islands manage to convey greater feelings of belonging and community, they are more cohesive units; ii) political systems in small countries are less complex, more elementary and easily accessible, so the costs of both getting informed and involved in politics are lower; iii) smallness also implies greater proximity and direct communication with leaders and these communication channels facilitate feelings of tolerance and understanding; and iv) small countries are more homogeneous, which leads to greater sympathy among citizens, more similarity in the effects of policies for all and greater knowledge, consideration and anticipation of the actions of others.

As we see in the universe of studies on the link between insularity and democracy, insularity itself as a geographical phenomenon has received little attention. Explanations of this

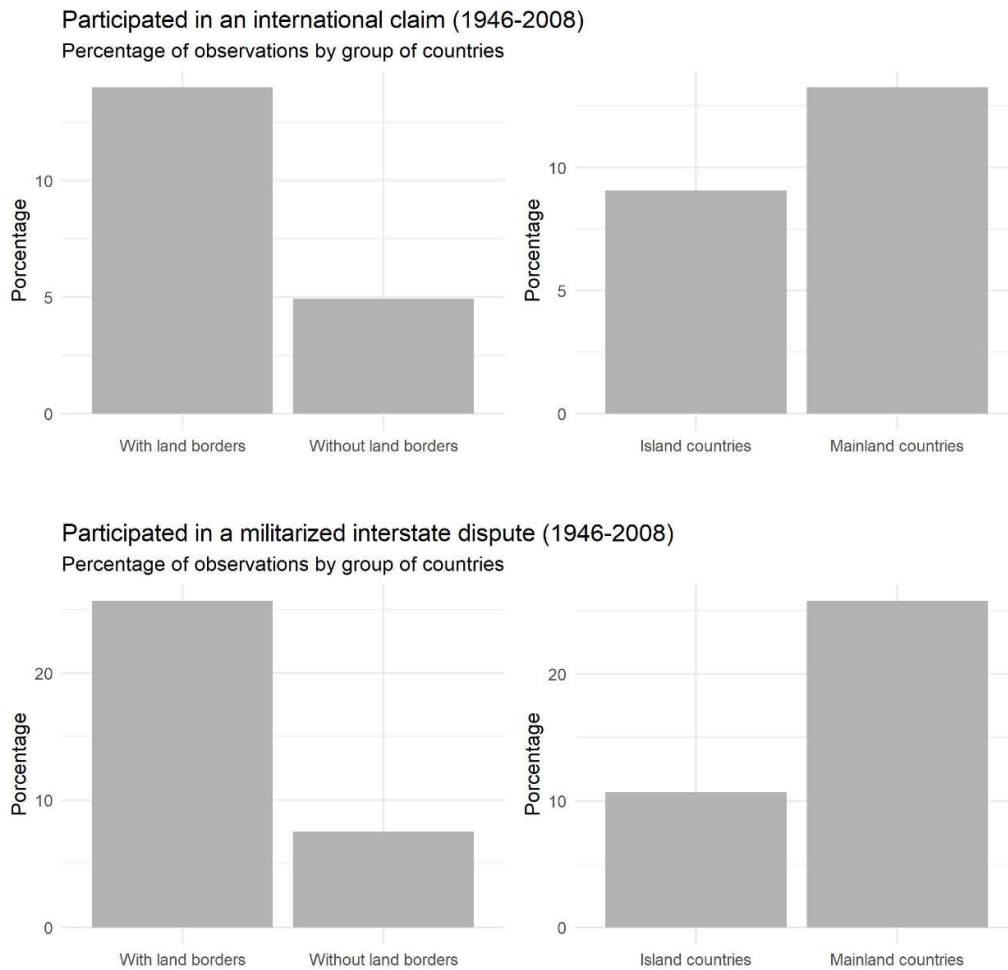
phenomenon have tended to follow two paths. Island countries have achieved higher levels of democracy because they were colonized by the United Kingdom or because they are smaller. Geographic isolation has only been theorized as a weighting of the effects of smallness. Clague *et al.* (2001) are the ones who associate factors more similar to those developed in the argument of this research with the high democratic levels of islands. They argue that the natural maritime barriers that isolate insular countries make them have fewer incentives to invest in their Armed Forces, which makes them have weaker and more decentralized political power, leading to higher levels of development and democracy.

Beyond this, their research does not focus on the effects of insularity but on the determinants of democracy in poor countries. There is no research within this literature that addresses in depth the impact of insularity on the probability of the emergence and survival of military dictatorships.

2.2 Contiguity and external threats

Another fact as little disputed as the high democratic levels of island countries is that the vast majority of interstate conflicts occur between contiguous countries or, failing that, nearby countries (Bremer, 1992; Chi *et al.*, 2014; Diehl, 1985; Gochman, 1990; Hensel and Mitchell, 2017; Reed and Chiba, 2010; Siverson and Starr, 1990; Starr and Most, 1978; Toft, 2014; Vasquez, 1995). In the following panel of bar charts, we can see how mainland countries tend to be more involved in both international claims and militarized interstate disputes than island countries and that the same is true when we compare countries that have land borders with those that do not (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Bar Chart Panel on External Threats by Country Groups



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from Hensel and Mitchell (2007a) and Maoz et al. (2019).

Gochman (1990) finds that 62% of those who initiated militarized interstate disputes between 1816 and 1976 were geographically proximate by land or sea, the vast majority of these being contiguous by land. Chi *et al.* (2014) show in their network analysis, where they examine the behavior of the actors during World War I, the positive effect of geographical contiguity on countries declaring war against each other. Weede (1970) also finds that countries bordering many countries are more likely to have more violent conflicts than geographically

isolated states. Diehl (1985) finds that, in land disputes between contiguous countries, the probability of escalation to war increases. Bremer's (1992) multivariate analysis shows that what makes a dyad of states more prone to war is the presence of contiguity between them, whether by land or sea.

It is important to explain why or how insularity leads countries to have lower external threats, or in parallel, why countries with land borders have more external threats. One of the main authors in the literature relating the contiguity of countries with their external threats is Vasquez (1995). He exposes three types of explanations as to why most wars tend to occur between bordering countries. According to the proximity explanation, distance affects both the opportunity and the incentives to go to war, since a more distant conflict is more costly and, therefore, its benefits are lower. In this sense, proximity would give countries greater opportunities to engage in war.

Second, the interactions' explanation states that the contiguity of countries makes them have more interactions with each other, such as for example through trade, which generates more opportunities for friction and thus conflict (Gochman, 1990; Starr and Most, 1976, 1978; Vasquez, 1995). Finally, there is the territorial explanation, which is the one advocated by Vasquez (1995). It establishes that contiguous countries are more likely to have disagreements over the delimitation of their borders, and these are the main causes for which wars break out.

The main difference between the proximity explanation and the other two is that it remains relatively constant, which may be a difficulty in considering it the cause of something as infrequent as war. However, the proximity explanation does not hold that proximity causes war, but rather provides the opportunity for war as an almost necessary condition. “(...) while

proximity provides the opportunity for war, territorial disputes provide the willingness to go to war” (Vasquez, 1995, p. 281).

The vast majority of scholars on these issues share that territorial issues tend to outweigh other possible reasons for conflict (Gibler, 2007; Gibler and Wolford, 2006; Hensel, 1996; Hensel and Mitchell, 2017; Hutchison and Gibler, 2007; Kim, 2019, 2020; Rider, 2013; Vasquez, 1995). Kocs (1995) finds that the existence of an official territorial dispute over contiguous territory for both sides is a key determinant of war. Vasquez (2004) finds that territorial disputes are more likely to escalate into war than other types of disputes. Senese and Vasquez (2005) in their study *Assessing the steps to war* argue that there is such a difference in the likelihood of escalation to military conflict between territorial disputes and other types of disputes that little emphasis should be placed on the latter.

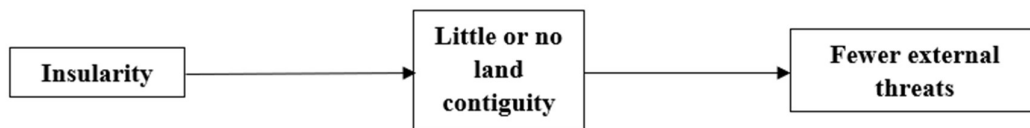
Furthermore, in another study, Vasquez and Leskiw (2001) find that states that dispute territory are more likely to become "rivals" and are more likely to go to war or embark on arms races. Likewise, Toft (2014) states that territorial conflicts last longer and are more difficult to resolve, which is why they tend to generate long rivalries. According to Dreyer (2012), this is so because these types of issues, unlike ideological disputes or those related to regime type, tend to outlast the mandates of different political leaders.

In a study that seeks to measure the preponderance of Vasquez's (1995) three explanations for why wars are between contiguous countries, Hensel (2000) finds that territorial disputes are the most important reason. Likewise, Vasquez (2001) also finds greater significance of territorial disputes than proximity in the probability of states going to war. Hensel and Mitchell (2017) in their comparison of military escalations in territorial, maritime or river disputes in

the period 1900-2001 found that while the former were more likely to lead to armed conflicts, the other two increasingly tended to be resolved through multilateral institutions or regional treaties.

Based on all this evidence, we can argue that, by not having contiguity with any country, in the case of the island countries without land borders, or having very limited contiguity, in the other cases, island countries are subject to fewer external threats (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Causal scheme 1



Source: Own elaboration.

2.3 External threats and the growth of the Armed Forces

The growth of the Armed Forces in a country can be roughly explained by three different reasons. First, it may stem from the pressures of bureaucratic lobbying. The Armed Forces, like any public bureaucracy, are rational and seek their own interest, which above all implies more budget and autonomy (Moe *et al.*, 1998). On top of that, they have specific characteristics that leverage their weight to pressure as a lobby such as the type of tasks they perform, their monopolistic regime and their high degree of centralization and cohesion, apart from the ability to threaten the governments with expelling them from power through of violence. These opportunities for political pressure increase every time the resources or autonomy of the Armed Forces increase, creating a “snowball effect”. Each time the Armed Forces win a political battle for more budget or autonomy, they are in a better position to pressure in the next dispute.

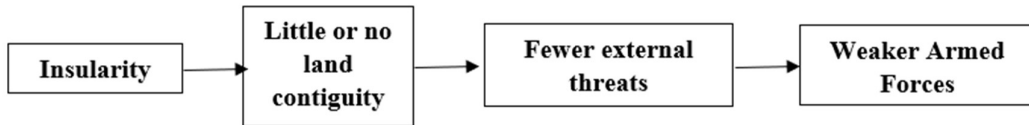
The second reason why governments may decide to invest in the Armed Forces is to protect themselves from internal threats (Batchelor *et al.*, 2002; Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Dunne and Perlo-Freeman, 2003). Collier and Hoeffler (2002) show how civil wars increase military spending budgets. Similarly, Batchelor *et al.* (2002) in their analysis of the evolution of military spending in South Africa show how at times increases were due solely to responding to internal threats such as miners' strikes, military revolts or anti-apartheid protests.

The third reason, on which the argument focuses, is to protect themselves from external threats (Batchelor *et al.*, 2002; Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Dunne and Perlo Freeman, 2003; Rider, 2013). Collier and Hoeffler (2002) find positive and statistically significant correlations between the countries' military spending with being involved in an international conflict, with having been involved in an international conflict after World War II, and with the military spending of neighboring countries. This last variable shows again how contiguity with neighboring countries is decisive in the perception of external threats and, thus, in the budgets allocated to the Armed Forces.

If external threats, particularly those coming from neighboring countries, are the main determinants of the growth of the Armed Forces, and island countries, having lesser degrees of contiguity with other countries, have fewer external threats, it is to be expected that they will have weaker Armed Forces (Figure 4). In fact, Sutton and Payne (1993), in their study of external threats to small islands, argue that the military security of island nations is at best limited, if not non-existent. The following figures show how the mean and median percentage of central government spending allotted to military issues and the mean and median percentage

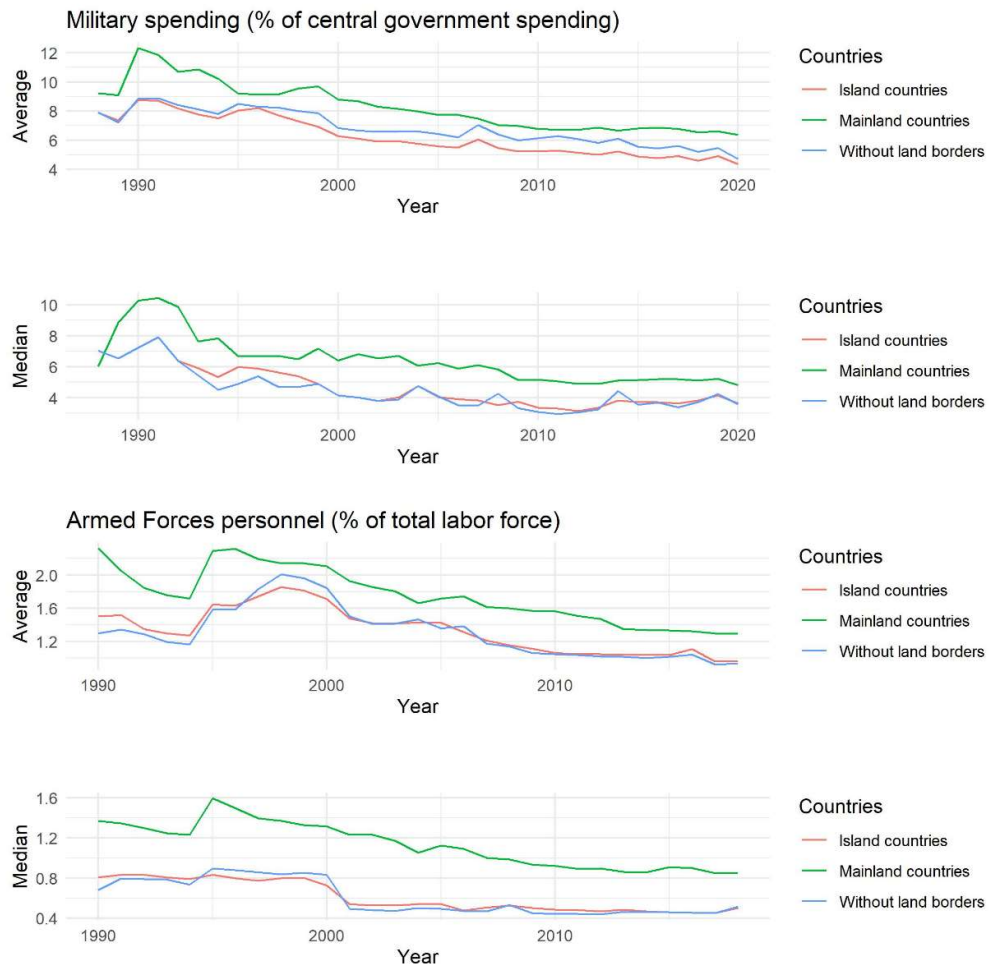
of Armed Forces personnel over the total workforce are significantly higher among mainland countries than among island countries and countries without land borders (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Causal scheme 2



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 5. Military spending and personnel by country groups



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from SIPRI (2021) and the World Bank (b).

2.4 Armed Forces growth and political regimes

The Armed Forces can affect the political regimes of the countries by protecting them from external or internal threats, thus ensuring the survival of the current regime, or through coups d'état, either with the aim of changing the government while preserving the regime or looking to install another type of political regime, such as the military one where they take over control of the government.

Guardianship dilemma theorists posit that threats to regime survival place civilian governments in a dilemma of magnitude. The government must decide whether to invest in its Armed Forces, providing them with greater capabilities to defend the territory but also to carry out coups, or not to invest and face threats only with already existing forces (Kim, 2019; McMahan and Slantchev, 2015; Paine, 2019).

Kim (2019) argues that external territorial threats, more common among contiguous countries, lead to a greater presence of collegial military regimes, and states that this is not the case with other types of external threats. Territorial threats cause states to develop and maintain Armed Forces with more resources, institutional autonomy and cohesion, which helps them to hoard political power. In addition, prolonged territorial threats foster a culture of militarism that allows and encourages further increases in the power, autonomy, and resources of the Armed Forces. With these resources, the opportunities for the Armed Forces to install military regimes increase.

Several studies, along with Kim's (2019), relate territorial threats to difficulties or lower levels of democracy. Gibler (2007) argues that democracy and peace are symptoms of the disappearance of territorial disputes. He asserts that states usually resolve their territorial

disputes before democratizing and not the other way around. According to Miller and Gibler (2011), one should speak of a "territorial peace" instead of a democratic one, since it is the end of territorial disputes that fosters peace and democratization. In the same vein, Kacowicz (1995) deals with the correlation between democracy and satisfaction with the territorial status quo and claims that it is the latter that brings peace, not democracy. Gibler and Tir (2010) show how, when territorial disputes are resolved through peaceful settlements, the likelihood of demilitarization, border stability and democratic transitions increase. Gibler and Wolford (2006) show that the presence of a defense pact with all neighboring states reduces the likelihood that a state will be the subject of a militarized territorial dispute, reduces the level of state militarization, and increases the likelihood of democratic transitions.

Similarly, Owsiak (2012, 2013) shows how when a state manages to solve all its territorial disputes with its neighboring countries, removing all its external territorial threats, the probabilities of democratization increase and those of autocratization decrease, an effect that is not seen when at least one of these disputes remains present. Likewise, the author states that the resolution of territorial disputes with all the state's neighbors significantly reduces the centralization and militarization of the state and increases respect for individual rights to the same extent. Hutchison and Gibler (2007) find that in the face of external territorial threats, and not external threats of other kinds, citizens' opinions tend to prioritize national unity over freedom of expression and other democratic rights. In other words, territorial threats diminish political tolerance.

If more powerful Armed Forces are more likely to interfere in domestic affairs and install military regimes, and the main determinants of the growth of the Armed Forces are external

threats, particularly those coming from neighboring countries, and island countries, having lower degrees of contiguity with other countries, have fewer external threats, it is to be expected that they will be less likely to live under military regimes (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Causal scheme 3



Source: Own elaboration.

2.5 Different Armed Forces and political regimes

There are few studies in which the Armed Forces are not taken as a monolithic and unified actor (Albrecht and Eibl, 2018; Kim, 2019; Paine, 2019; Powell, 2012). For this research, the most important of these is Hintze (1975). He states that land forces historically tend to permeate the entire body of the State, being necessary allies of the propertied classes to give survival to different regimes. In contrast, maritime forces are fists that extend to the rest of the world, but they do not serve against internal enemies. Thus, a military with more powerful land forces is more capable and likely to interfere in internal political affairs, stage coups and/or install military regimes. On the contrary, a more maritime-predominated Armed Forces would be more alienated from domestic affairs and less capable and likely to stage coups and/or install military regimes.

If the Armed Forces with greater land power are more inclined to interfere in domestic affairs and install military regimes, and the Armed Forces of island countries, having lesser degrees of contiguity with other countries, tend to prioritize the other forces over these, it is to be expected that they will be less likely to live under military rule (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Causal scheme 4



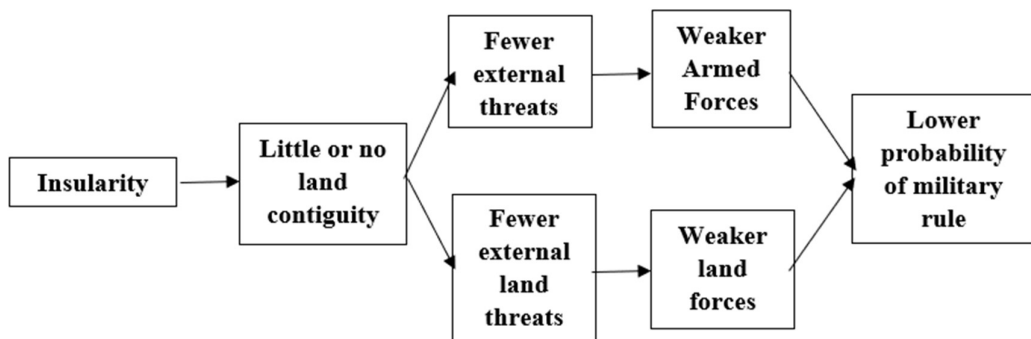
Source: Own elaboration.

2. Insularity and military regimes

The argument sought to be defended in this paper is that, having little or no land contiguity, island countries not only have fewer external threats in general, but also these are very rarely of terrestrial nature. Thus, island countries not only have incentives to invest less than mainland countries in their Armed Forces in general, but also have even fewer incentives to invest in their land branch, the most capable of intervening in internal repression.

As a result of this double path of lower investment in general and even less investment in the key forces for internal involvement, island countries tend to have weaker Armed Forces to exert political pressure or to carry out coups that succeed in installing military regimes. For this reason, island countries are expected to have a lower probability of suffering regimes of this type (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Complete causal scheme



Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H: *Island countries are less likely to live under military rule.*

3. Definitions, methods and techniques

A quantitative methodology is used, in particular logistic regression statistical models. The units of analysis comprise all independent states, with one observation for each year in the period 1946-2008, which is the period for which Cheibub *et al.* (2010) collect data. Consolidated democracies are excluded from the sample, understanding them as those with 25 years of uninterrupted democracy, as Kim (2019) does in his study, to control the effects of such consolidation on the emergence of military regimes³. The same models including these cases are shown in the appendix, where it can be seen that this decision does not generate relevant differences in the results.

To measure our independent variable of interest, insularity, two distinct dichotomous variables are coded. The first (Island) divides the units of analysis into island and non-island states according to Anckar (1996), which defines island states as “*states that are islands or parts of an island or consist of islands and parts of islands*” (p. 702). Likewise, an island is understood as any portion of subcontinental land surrounded by water (Anckar, 1996). The second variable (Nolandborders) divides the states with some kind of land border from those

³Democracy in this case is measured using the *Regimes of the World* variable, which Lührmann *et al.* (2018) build on indexes and indicators created by Coppedge *et al.* (2021), which classifies political regimes into closed autocracies, electoral autocracies, electoral democracies, and liberal democracies. For our purposes, we will convert the same variable into another dichotomous variable that classifies both electoral and closed autocracies as autocracies and both electoral and liberal democracies as democracies.

without any land border. In line with Clague *et al.* (2001) here only countries that are entirely surrounded by water are taken as islands.

For the dependent variable, a dichotomous variable is used that indicates which countries had or did not have military dictatorships each year (CGVmil), coded from Cheibub *et al.* (2010) database. It will have the value 1 when the *regime* variable of Cheibub *et al.* (2010) takes the value 4, which corresponds to military dictatorships, and it will have the value 0 when the same variable takes any other value. Cheibub *et al.* (2010) distinguish military dictatorships from monarchic dictatorships in that in the former the effective head of government does not bear the title of king and his succession is not hereditary, and from civilian dictatorships in that the effective head of government is a current or former member of the Armed Forces.

Likewise, the models control for the effects of several variables shown in Table 2. To control for the two main rival hypotheses relating insularity to levels of democracy, we include variables of both the size of the territory (km_th) and the size of the population (Popmillion) of the countries in the sample, as well as a dichotomous variable that controls for whether or not the country gained its independence from the British Empire (col_bri). In addition, to control for the effects of internal threats, as opposed to the external ones that are part of our causal mechanism, a dichotomous variable is incorporated that defines whether or not there is a record that the country has previously experienced an internal armed conflict (HadIntConf), counting only events that occurred after 1945⁴. A dichotomous variable is also added to control

⁴A cut-off year must be chosen here to ensure variation between cases. Internal conflicts can probably be found in all countries if we go back further. The year 1945 was chosen because it was considered a year of rupture in the structuring of the international order that rearranged the political dynamics of most of the countries of the world, so it is assumed that the internal conflicts that occurred after this year maintain a greater weight in the political dynamics of the countries than those that occurred in previous years.

for the international context, which is coded based on whether the year of the units of analysis is subsequent or not to 1991 (ColdWar), when the Soviet Union was dissolved, which is taken as an indicator of the end of the Cold War international context. Finally, two economic control variables are added. One of structural nature, which measures the level of wealth of the observations by averaging their last five years of Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDPpc5), and the other, which measures the degree of economic integration through the commercial openness of the observations (Commerce).

Two sets of five logistic regression models are performed, each one in panels controlled by geographic regions taken from the United Nations Statistics Division (2013), to measure the effects of both being an island country and having no land borders on the probability of having military dictatorships according to Cheibub *et al.* (2010).

Table 2: Control variables

Concept	Variable	Indicator	Source
Country size	Land surface	Thousands of km ² of land surface	Haber and Menaldo (2011) Weidman et al. (2010)
Size of the population	Population	Millions of inhabitants	Clio -Infra (2018) Coppedge et al. (2021)
Colonial legacy	British colonization	Did the country in question gain its independence from the British Empire?	Hensel and Mitchell (2007b)
Internal threats	Experience of an internal armed conflict	Did the country previously experience an internal armed conflict after 1945?	Brecke (2001) Coppedge et al. (2021)
International context	Cold War	Is the year of the observation prior to the dissolution of the USSR (1991)?	Own coding

Economic wealth	Socioeconomic level	Average GDPpc of the last 5 years in thousands of dollars	Bolt and Van Zanden (2014) Bolt and Van Zanden (2020)
Commercial interdependence	Degree of trade openness	Level of merchandise trade as % of GDP	World Bank (a)

Table 3. Descriptive data

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
CGVmil	3,778	0.274	0.446	0	1
Nolandborders	3,778	0.097	0.296	0	1
Island	3,778	0.131	0.337	0	1
km_th	3,778	750.427	1,598.040	0.295	16,827.200
Popmillion	3,778	34.652	126.229	0.062	1,262.645
col_bri	3,778	0.290	0.454	0	1
ColdWar	3,778	0.719	0.450	0	1
HadIntConf	3,778	0.546	0.498	0	1
GDPpc5	3,778	5.823	6.504	0.424	60.603
Commerce	3,778	49.014	37.961	4.539	575.615

4. Results

Table 4 shows the first set of statistical models, where we can see the effects of not having land borders on the probability of having military regimes. Table 5 shows the second set of statistical models, in which the only change with respect to the first set is on the independent variable of interest, which is Island instead of Nolandborders. According to all the regression models, the probability of having a military dictatorship is lower if one is an island country and if one has no land borders than in the opposite cases. These probabilities maintain a confidence level of 99.9%.

The first models (Model 1) in both sets are the ones controlling for the variables described in the previous section, and four more models, identical for each set, are developed separately to give robustness to the results. The second model changes the way of measuring internal

threats, with another dichotomous variable (HadCWar), which defines whether or not there is a record that the country has previously experienced a civil war according to Haber and Menaldo (2011), counting only events that occurred after 1945. The third model stops controlling for the variable Commerce to increase the number of cases included in the sample because for this variable we only have data from 1960 onwards. The fourth model changes the control variable GDPpc5 for a more conjunctural one, the average economic growth as a % of GDP over the last 5 years (GDPgrowth5), which is coded from data extracted from Coppedge *et al.* (2021). Finally, the fifth model, with the same data from Coppedge *et al.* (2021), recodes this same last variable to control for economic growth as a % of the GDP of the year prior to the year of the observation (GDPgrowth).

As we see, the coefficients of our two independent variables of interest retain the negative sign, similar magnitudes and are statistically significant at the same 99.9% confidence level in all models, which indicates the strong robustness of the relationship in these empirical measurements.

Analyzing the other variables included in the models, we find that four of them maintain statistical significance and the same sign in all the models in which they are included. British colonization (col_bri), higher levels of wealth (GDPpc5) and higher trade openness (Commerce) are associated with lower probabilities of countries having military regimes and, on the contrary, the international context of the Cold War (ColdWar) is associated with higher probabilities of countries having military regimes.

Table 4: First set of statistical models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
(Intercept)	-0,59* (0,23)	-0,72** (0,23)	-0,71*** (0,17)	0,20 (0,23)	0,23 (0,23)
Nolandborders	-1,44*** (0,25)	-1,56*** (0,24)	-1,79*** (0,23)	-1,78*** (0,24)	-1,79*** (0,24)
log(Popmillion)	-0,10** (0,03)	0,12* (0,05)	0,18*** (0,03)	0,10* (0,04)	0,10* (0,04)
log(km_th)	0,09** (0,03)	-0,12** (0,04)	-0,09** (0,03)	-0,15*** (0,04)	-0,15*** (0,04)
ColdWar	0,55*** (0,10)	0,65*** (0,10)	0,45*** (0,09)	0,63*** (0,10)	0,63*** (0,10)
col_bri	-0,56*** (0,11)	-0,55*** (0,11)	-0,31*** (0,09)	-0,38*** (0,10)	-0,39*** (0,10)
HadIntConf	0,18* (0,09)		0,04 (0,07)	0,23** (0,09)	0,24** (0,09)
GDPpc5	-0,14*** (0,01)	-0,12*** (0,01)	-0,14*** (0,01)		
Commerce	-0,01*** (0,00)	-0,01** (0,00)		-0,01*** (0,00)	-0,01*** (0,00)
sigma	1,12*** (0,09)	0,82*** (0,06)	1,46*** (0,09)	1,65*** (0,09)	1,66*** (0,09)
HadCWar		0,32*** (0,09)			
GDPgrowth5				0,85 (1,07)	
GDPgrowth					0,66 (0,63)
Log Likelihood	-1850,57	-1830,57	-2528,37	-1873,56	-1867,27
AIC	3721,14	3681,14	5074,74	3767,13	3754,55
N obs.	3778	3778	5389	3772	3776

*** $p < 0,001$; ** $p < 0,01$; * $p < 0,05$

Table 5: Second set of statistical models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
(Intercept)	0,32 (0,23)	0,35 (0,23)	-0,54** (0,17)	0,22 (0,23)	0,26 (0,23)
Island	-1,64*** (0,26)	-1,69*** (0,27)	-1,70*** (0,17)	-1,88*** (0,31)	-1,89*** (0,31)
log(Popmillion)	0,12** (0,04)	0,12** (0,04)	0,18*** (0,04)	0,10* (0,04)	0,10* (0,04)
log(km_th)	-0,16*** (0,04)	-0,16*** (0,04)	-0,11*** (0,03)	-0,15*** (0,04)	-0,16*** (0,04)
ColdWar	0,60*** (0,10)	0,62*** (0,10)	0,48*** (0,10)	0,63*** (0,10)	0,62*** (0,10)
col_bri	-0,51*** (0,11)	-0,50*** (0,11)	-0,34*** (0,10)	-0,37*** (0,10)	-0,38*** (0,10)
HadIntConf	0,20* (0,09)		0,11 (0,07)	0,25** (0,09)	0,25** (0,09)
GDPpc5	-0,15*** (0,01)	-0,14*** (0,01)	-0,13*** (0,01)		
Commerce	-0,01*** (0,00)	-0,01*** (0,00)		-0,01*** (0,00)	-0,01*** (0,00)
sigma	1,30*** (0,09)	1,30*** (0,09)	1,27*** (0,10)	1,65*** (0,10)	1,66*** (0,10)
HadCWar		0,19* (0,09)			
GDPgrowth5				0,93 (1,08)	
GDPgrowth					0,70 (0,63)
Log Likelihood	-1826,71	-1826,95	-2531,96	-1871,40	-1865,08
AIC	3673,41	3673,90	5081,93	3762,80	3750,17
N obs.	3778	3778	5389	3772	3776

*** $p < 0,001$; ** $p < 0,01$; * $p < 0,05$

5. Conclusions

This paper proposed a novel theory of how structural geographic factors such as insularity and the absence of land borders affect the probability of developing military regimes. According to it, island countries are less likely to have military regimes because, having little or no land contiguity, they have fewer external threats in general, and even fewer external land threats, so they not only have incentives to invest less than mainland countries in their Armed Forces in general, but even less in that key branch for internal involvement, the Army. Thus, their Armed Forces are in a much weaker position to establish and sustain military regimes when they are presented with incentives to do so.

In order to empirically support this theory, evidence was collected showing, with a confidence level of 99.9%, that the probability of having a military dictatorship is lower if one is an island country and if one has no land borders than in the opposite cases. Likewise, the research showed descriptive evidence that is consistent with the causal mechanism advocated.

In this way, this paper connects two portions of the literature that until now remained uncommunicated, such as the one that deals with the determinants of the high democratic levels of the island countries and the one that deals with the causal relationships between contiguity, external threats, Armed Forces and political regimes, showing how apparently dissimilar lines of research have connections of relevance to both.

This paper also contributes by incorporating the influence of the ultimate factor of geography in the causes of the establishment and survival of military regimes. Likewise, it shows how structural factors quite unrelated to the behavior of the agents can significantly

influence how the power relations between them are structured, and how these relations are determinant in the structuring of political regimes.

Finally, it also innovates by disaggregating the Armed Forces actor into its different branches, when it is usually taken as monolithic and unified by the specialized literature. When we see this actor as monolithic and unified, we lose sight of the different interests and forms of power that its subunits may have internally, which may be key in how the Armed Forces act and react to different political phenomena.

Much remains to be studied about how this and other structural geographic factors end up restricting or determining the margins on which the actors define how to structure their relationships with each other. Likewise, much remains for future work to dig deeper into the understanding of how our variables of interest interact and to add evidence that gives greater empirical robustness to these interactions.

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Appendix

Table 6. First set of statistical models including consolidated democracies

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
(Intercept)	-0,06 (0,22)	0,34 (0,23)	-0,72*** (0,17)	-0,91*** (0,23)	-0,88*** (0,23)
Nolandborders	-1,54*** (0,24)	-1,67*** (0,24)	-1,79*** (0,23)	-1,83*** (0,24)	-1,84*** (0,24)
log(Popmillion)	0,00 (0,03)	0,14** (0,04)	0,18*** (0,03)	0,06 (0,04)	0,07 (0,04)
log(km_th)	-0,04 (0,03)	-0,16*** (0,04)	-0,09** (0,03)	-0,08* (0,04)	-0,08* (0,04)
ColdWar	0,56*** (0,10)	0,61*** (0,10)	0,46*** (0,09)	0,73*** (0,10)	0,72*** (0,10)
col_bri	-0,63*** (0,10)	-0,50*** (0,11)	-0,32*** (0,09)	-0,67*** (0,11)	-0,69*** (0,11)
HadIntConf	0,38*** (0,09)		0,08 (0,07)	0,53*** (0,09)	0,54*** (0,09)
GDPpc5	-0,19*** (0,01)	-0,16*** (0,01)	-0,16*** (0,01)		
Commerce	-0,00* (0,00)	-0,01*** (0,00)		-0,01*** (0,00)	-0,01*** (0,00)
sigma	1,22*** (0,09)	1,36*** (0,09)	1,50*** (0,10)	1,28*** (0,06)	1,28*** (0,06)
HadCWar		0,18* (0,09)			
GDPgrowth5				1,84 (1,12)	
GDPgrowth					0,89 (0,65)
Log Likelihood	-1851,57	-1845,12	-2546,81	-1904,47	-1898,55
AIC	3723,14	3710,24	5111,62	3828,94	3817,10
N obs.	4558	4558	6395	4552	4556

*** $p < 0,001$; ** $p < 0,01$; * $p < 0,05$

Table 7. Second set of statistical models including consolidated democracies

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
(Intercept)	0,24 (0,29)	0,35 (0,23)	-0,68*** (0,17)	-0,87*** (0,23)	-0,84*** (0,23)
Island	-1,64*** (0,27)	-1,73*** (0,27)	-1,61*** (0,16)	-1,90*** (0,23)	-1,91*** (0,23)
log(Popmillion)	0,11* (0,05)	0,13** (0,04)	0,18*** (0,03)	0,06 (0,04)	0,07 (0,04)
log(km_th)	-0,14** (0,06)	-0,16*** (0,04)	-0,09** (0,03)	-0,08* (0,04)	-0,09* (0,04)
ColdWar	0,59*** (0,10)	0,61*** (0,10)	0,47*** (0,09)	0,72*** (0,10)	0,72*** (0,10)
col_bri	-0,52*** (0,11)	-0,51*** (0,11)	-0,36*** (0,09)	-0,67*** (0,11)	-0,68*** (0,11)
HadIntConf	0,28* (0,11)		0,11 (0,07)	0,54*** (0,09)	0,55*** (0,09)
GDPpc5	-0,17*** (0,03)	-0,16*** (0,01)	-0,16*** (0,01)		
Commerce	-0,01** (0,00)	-0,01*** (0,00)		-0,01*** (0,00)	-0,01*** (0,00)
sigma	1,33*** (0,09)	1,34*** (0,09)	1,47*** (0,09)	1,27*** (0,07)	1,27*** (0,07)
HadCWar		0,18* (0,09)			
GDPgrowth5				1,86 (1,12)	
GDPgrowth					0,90 (0,65)
Log Likelihood	-1841,38	-1843,46	-2549,01	-1901,19	-1895,25
AIC	3702,75	3706,92	5116,02	3822,39	3810,50
N obs.	4558	4558	6395	4552	4556

*** $p < 0,001$; ** $p < 0,01$; * $p < 0,05$