



The Curse of Geography: How Governments Preempt Secession Attempts



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Research Question

Puzzle:

- Why is there no relationship between the governability of territory and rebel goal?

Answer:

- Governments anticipate secession attempts in most suitable areas and invest to prevent them

Motivation

- Collected original dataset of goals for all ethnic territorial rebel groups 1990-2013
- Used geospatial data on population to measure governability of territory
- No relationship between governability and goal

Theory

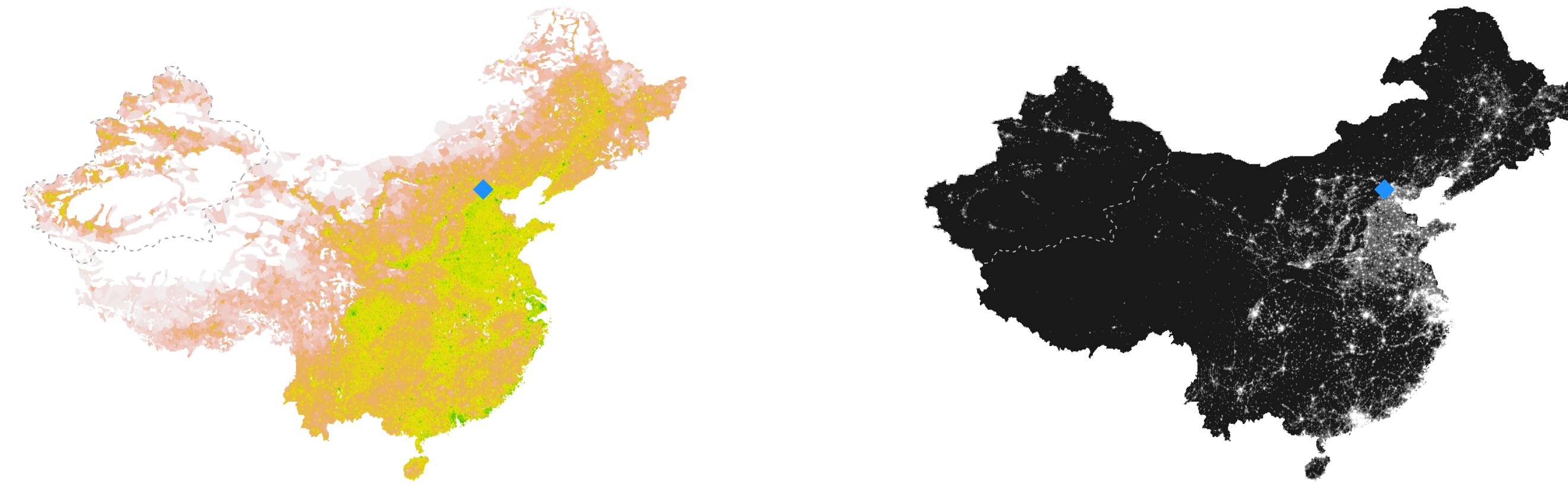
- Different territories are more or less governable as a function of the resources they contain
- Territories far from the reach of the state are more governable
- Population is on one of the most important resources for governance
- Marginalized ethnic groups that control governable territory will be more likely to fight for secession
- Geography is relatively static and governments use their knowledge of human geography to preempt conflict in areas most suited to secession
- This preemption can be measured globally using nighttime light emissions as they correlate with local measures of state capacity[1]

Hypothesis: The effect of territorial governability on nightlights should be positive and increasing in distance from the capital

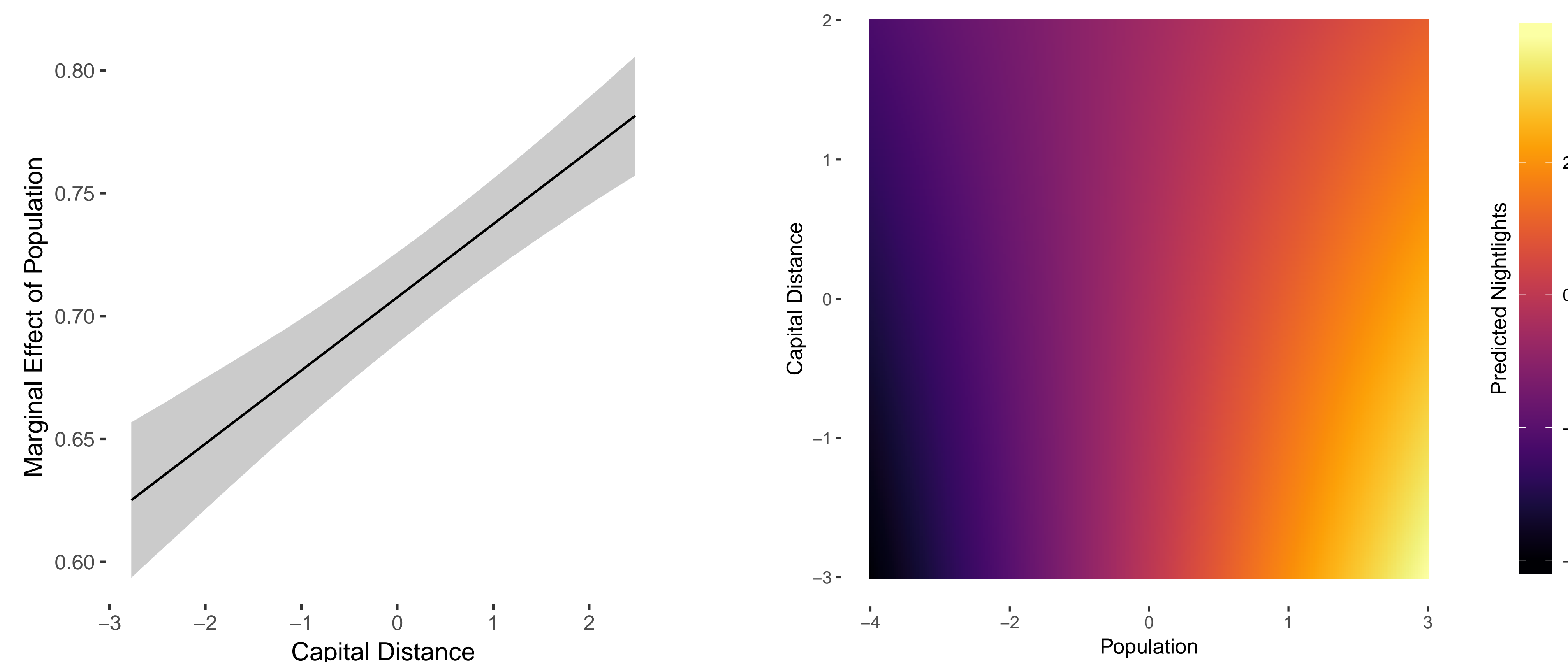
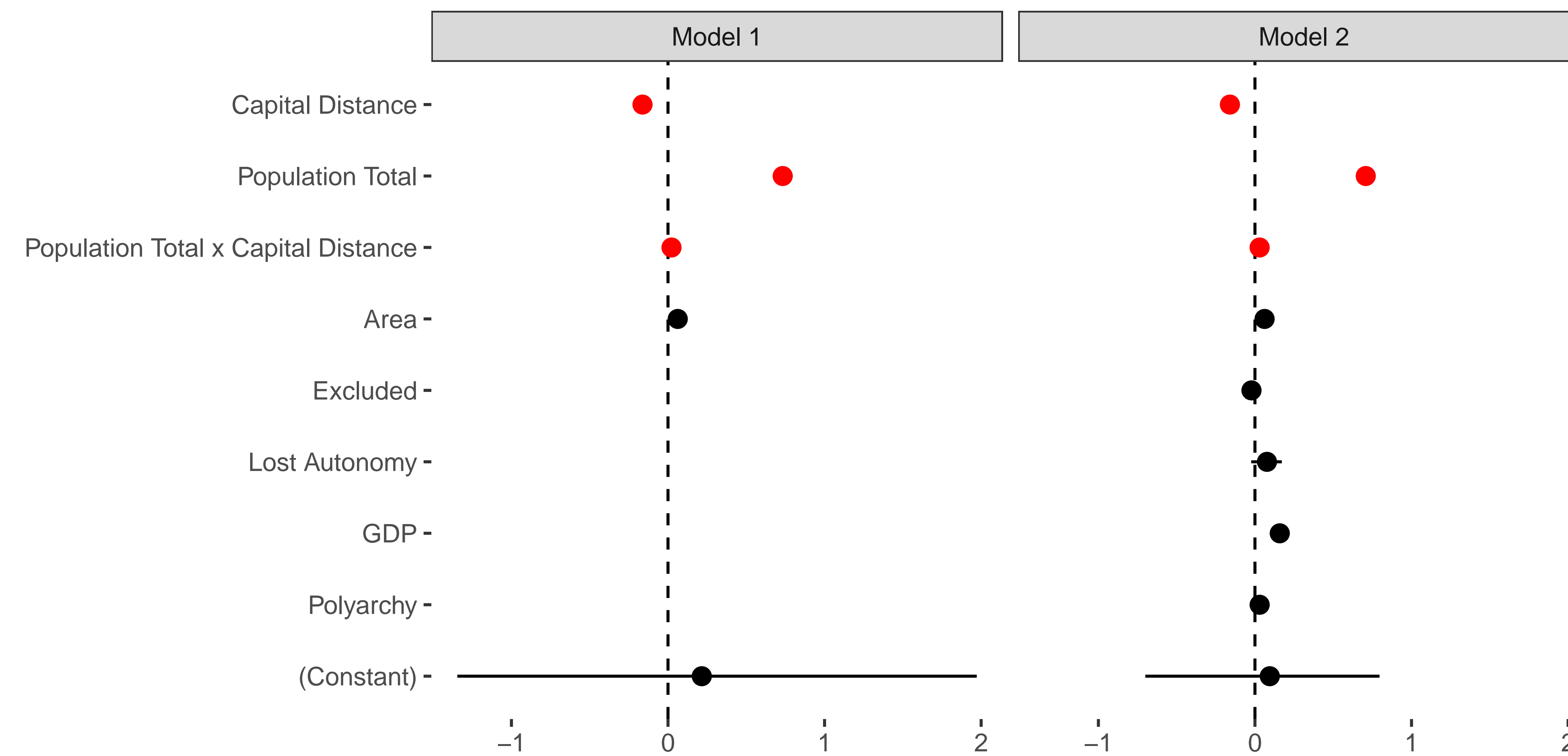
Data

- GeoEPR & EPR
- GPWv4 Population
- NOAA Nightlights
- V-Dem & WDI

Illustration



Results



Model

$$Y \sim \mathcal{N}(\alpha + \gamma + \mathbf{X}\beta, \sigma^2)$$

$$\beta \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_\beta, \sigma_\beta)$$

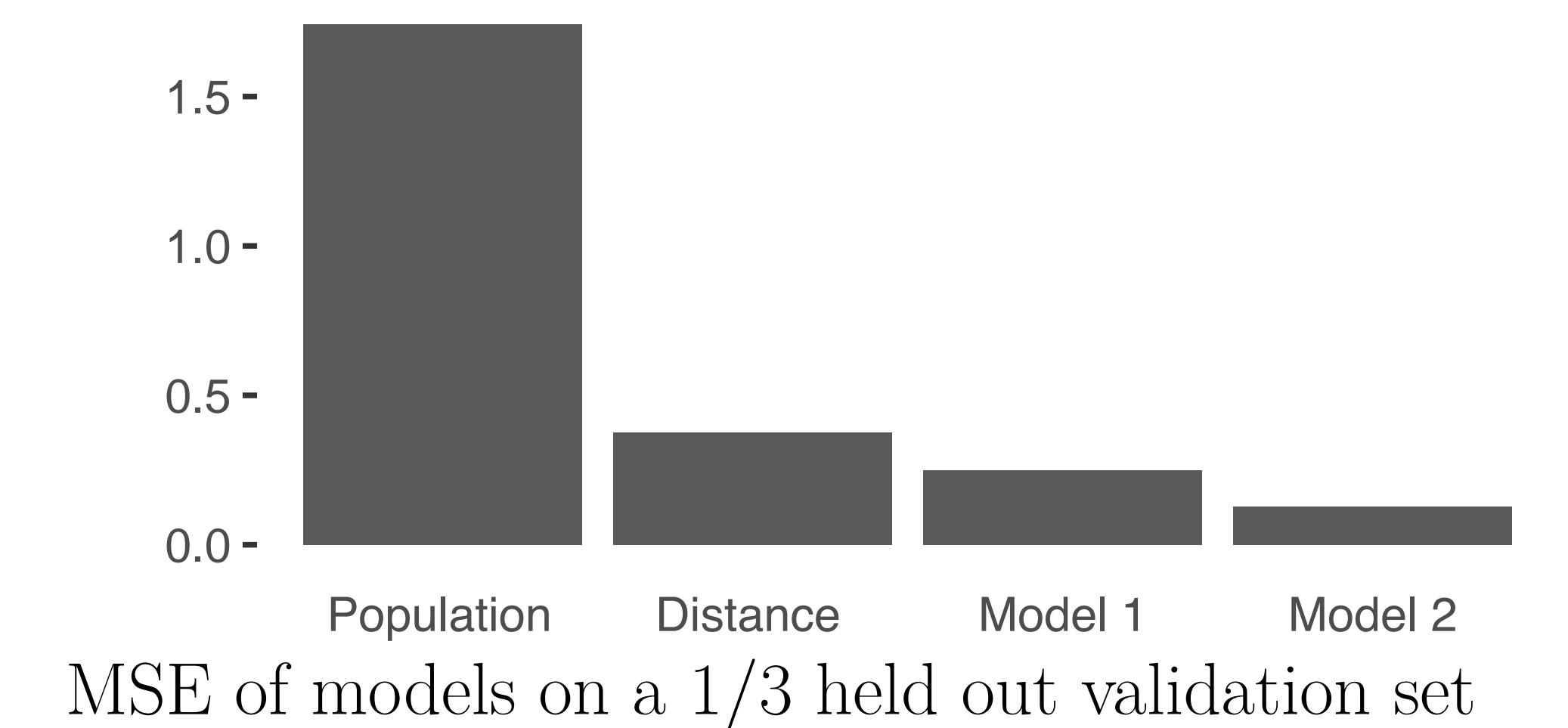
$$\alpha \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_\alpha, \sigma_\alpha)$$

$$\gamma \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_\gamma, \sigma_\gamma)$$

$$\mu_\alpha, \mu_\beta, \mu_\gamma \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 5)$$

$$\sigma_\alpha, \sigma_\gamma, \sigma_\beta, \sigma \sim \text{Cauchy}(0, 2.5)$$

Out of Sample Validation



Discussion

- Governments seem to invest more in areas which are both populous and remote
- Nightlights correlated with both military infrastructure and public goods
- Weakly positive effect of lost autonomy suggests states devote attention to secession prone areas[2]

Next Steps

- Medium N study of internal colonialism e.g. Aceh, Northeastern Sri Lanka, Ireland
- Historical study of forced relocations e.g. Soviet deportations, Armenian genocide

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References

- [1] Ore Koren and Anoop K. Sarbahi. State Capacity, Insurgency, and Civil War: A Disaggregated Analysis. *International Studies Quarterly*, Forthcoming.
- [2] David S. Siroky and John Cuffe. Lost Autonomy, Nationalism and Separatism. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(1):3-34, January 2015.