

Research Statement

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My research is motivated by an interest in collective action outside of formal institutions. I am particularly interested in violent and nonviolent responses by citizens to changing political contexts. Where many political scientists focus on individual behavior conditioned by institutions, I study the interaction of state actors and dissidents and the conditions under which citizens choose various types of action or inaction. In general, I pursue topics that cross international relations and comparative politics.

My dissertation project asks why we see civil wars in some weak states and not others. Previous work demonstrates that “weak” states (e.g., those states with a low Gross Domestic Product (GDP)) are susceptible to this type of violence but can not explain why many such states avoid civil war. I argue that a second dimension of state capacity, societal support for the state and its policies, also conditions the likelihood of civil war. Building on Levi’s Of Rule and Revenue, I develop an explicit model of the relationship among societal support, resources available to the state, and the onset of civil war, and show how this model increases our ability to predict civil war occurrences as compared to the naive weak state model. Additionally, I demonstrate that civil war is a *process* of violence between states and dissidents and argue for modeling this interaction. In short, states with low GDP that choose to repress their citizens are at the most risk for civil war. Beyond explaining onset of civil war, I apply this model of state capacity to other forms of violent contention including terrorism, interstate conflict, and repression of human rights.

Another puzzle that interests me is why states use repression when it often leads to increased mobilization of dissent. In a paper with Mike Findley, a recent graduate of the University of Illinois now on faculty at BYU, we develop a model of insurgent responses to state repression which identifies the conditions where different counterinsurgency strategies succeed or fail. The first paper from this project is forthcoming in the journal *Civil*

Wars and grew out of an International Studies Association panel on insurgency that I organized.

In a separate solo-authored project addressing similar questions about state-dissident interaction, I constructed an original data set from the Iraq War that includes counterinsurgent operations and coalition deaths in an attempt to explain how the different types of counterinsurgent operations lead to different insurgent responses. Previous work highlights two contending approaches to counterinsurgency, ‘hearts and minds’ and ‘attrition’, these papers demonstrate that hearts and minds approaches tend to reduce insurgent activity when facing a resolved enemy. When states face enemies who are less resolved or when states tactics are unconstrained, attrition campaigns can be successful.

Beyond studying civil war and insurgency, I am interested in terrorism and other forms of political violence perpetrated by weak actors. I have begun a project with Laura Dugan, a criminologist from Maryland, in which we investigate democracy’s effect on the likelihood of a state experiencing terrorism. There is a debate in the literature about the impact of democracy on terror with some scholars claiming that democracy promotes terror by allowing groups to mobilize whereas others argue democracy reduces terror as dissidents can channel their frustration through responsive institutions. We show that the number of veto players in a political system is the critical component explaining variance in domestic terror. Using the newly created Global Terror Database our findings support the notion that systems with many actors who can veto policy are more likely to generate terror incidents than systems with few veto players.

In addition to understanding violent reactions by dissidents, I pursue questions related to nonviolent citizen action. A project that Peter Kingstone, a professor from the University of Connecticut, and I are pursuing relates to protest movements against privatization of state-owned companies in Latin America. We assembled an original data set of protests against privatization that spans 18 countries and 15 years. This paper is currently being revised and resubmitted for publication at *Latin American Politics and Society*. We

identify conditions that make the success of these movements more likely and trace this process in several cases including the water privatization that led to an uproar in Bolivia. My interest in both Latin America and protests was sparked during the years that I lived in Brazil when I witnessed mass movements outside of my apartment in Brasilia on a regular basis.

Although my main research interest relates to state–dissident interaction, I also pursue questions relating to economic reform and the developing world. While the previous paper nicely melds both research streams, Peter and I also have a forthcoming article in *Political Research Quarterly* that asks: What’s left for the left in Latin America? We analyze economic reform across 15 states in Latin America over a 28 year period and find that the left is severely constrained in their ability to challenge neoliberal reforms. In fact, we find no substantive or statistical difference between leftist presidents and the rest. Finally, Dale Smith, Quan Li and I have a paper that looks at capital liberalization in the region and find similar results regarding the left’s ability to provide an alternative to liberalization and offer an explanation based on the dramatic effects of the debt crisis on the region’s economic policies.

In the future, I plan to pursue projects that identify the conditions where dissidents use violence or nonviolence to challenge state policy and whether or not their choices lead to movement success or failure. This leads me to study topics ranging from terrorism to protest to civil war. Finally, I will continue to pursue how citizens in developing countries respond to economic changes and offer explanations for why they often turn to informal means to challenge these reforms.