

Research Statement

When I was young, my family and I lived on a military base in West Germany. I, as all children do, had a lot of questions about the world and, specific to our family, why an American army was located in a foreign country. My father, not a talkative man, would respond to his son's queries with a single word, "politics." I think this probably started my interest in the field - a single word had the potential to explain so much of the world. I think my research agenda represents that diversity. Overall, my research focuses on new threats to international security; specifically, I seek to understand the microbehavior of terrorist groups as well as the role of the environment in shaping conflict and cooperation.

My dissertation focuses on terrorist targeting choice. I argue, using domestic terrorism as my focus, that targeting can be seen as a result of a bargaining interaction between the terrorist organization and government over the support of the public. Specifically, I contend it is how the public is arrayed between the two that determines what type of target is chosen. In situations where the populace shifts towards the terrorist organization, a surplus of ideal recruits is available. Because groups screen for the best recruits, only a small subset of this newfound support is necessary. As a result, it can choose to attack civilian targets and be insulated from the backlash that normally results. In those instances where the populace shifts towards the government, the supply of ideal recruits is low. As a result, the group selects non-civilian targets in the hopes of changing perceptions about the terrorist organization in order to bring people to the group in the future.

In the dissertation, I argue that the distribution changes when it is affected by one of three types of factors – government action, institutional characteristics, and the group environment. In the first, government performance in the economy and in the treatment of its citizens provides the impetus to shift the distribution between the terrorist organization and the government. In the second set of factors, the institutional characteristics of the state determine the costs associated with different targets. For example, in autocratic states, terrorist organizations should be more likely to attack non-civilian targets regardless of the distribution of the public. This is because the public is less relevant in determining policy. Instead, the only way to effect policy in these states is to attack those areas that provide the leader with their power; in this case, non-civilian targets. Lastly, the group environment plays a role in the selection of targets. Here, states that have little competition amongst terrorist groups encourage civilian targeting regardless of the distribution of the population. This occurs because there are few alternatives for disaffected people to achieve political change.

In the dissertation, I utilize terrorism data from the GTD (Global Terrorism Database). I also develop a unique coding rule to distinguish domestic from international terrorism. To create my target types, I use the counterterrorism literature to create a target typology of civilian and non-civilian targets. And lastly, I create a dependent variable to indicate a group's propensity for civilian targeting. Results indicate that groups respond to unemployment; groups are more likely to engage in civilian targeting when the popular

distribution is in the group's favor. Subsequent empirical chapters focus on institutional characteristics and the group environment. Preliminary evidence indicates that monopoly has the theorized effect –civilian targeting is selected despite the distribution of the populace.

This research differs from previous studies in several ways. First, unlike most quantitative studies on terrorism, it focuses on acts of domestic terrorism. This is done because domestic terrorism is more prevalent than international terror; some counts have it outpacing international terror by a factor of eight to one. In addition, I believe this provides a truer test of many common variables in terrorism research. For example, unemployment may encourage domestic terrorism because the lack of opportunity emboldens individuals to acts of violence. For international terrorism, the same mechanism likely does not hold; domestic unemployment in one country has little bearing on the decision of an international group to attack that country. Second, an understanding of targeting allows us to see that groups are evolving entities that adapt over time. Merely eliminating members or the incentives to conduct terror does not eliminate the threat. Rather, the group changes its appeal by changing the targets of its violence. Third, understanding targeting allows us to create more efficient responses and deterrents. Lastly, analyzing target selection as a strategy of escalation may allow an integration of terrorism work with research on civil and interstate war. Work on the role cheap signals, the diffusion of tactics, and intergroup cooperation may be potential future avenues of research for domestic terrorism.

I hope to develop this dissertation into a book manuscript. I think that its focus on domestic terrorism and the effects of external factors on the bargaining process provides a novel way to look at terrorist group behavior. One hope I have for a potential manuscript is that it can be accessible to academia as well as those in the policy community. One way I hope to do that is to add real-world examples to the theoretical discussion; I think recent news that the Taliban has issued codes of conduct for its members is an interesting example of behavior, that appears counterintuitive, which can be addressed through a book on the subject. In addition, I think that a manuscript on this issue would provide a good demonstration how violence is endogenous to group goals and how terrorism may fit within a broader framework of violence.

Outside of my dissertation, my research also examines how domestic political institutions affect the onset and intensity of terror. Previous studies have discussed the potential effects of representation on violence. However, these results have often been contradictory. Using a measure of political parties, a coauthor and I found that institutional design has non-linear effects on the occurrence of domestic terror; few parties leave voices out of the political process while many parties increase the cacophony of these voices – leading to more terrorism in both cases. This is important because it nuances our understanding of democracy and terrorism and, furthermore, has important implications for those seeking to design optimal institutions.

In addition to my research on terrorism, I am interested on the effect of the environment on international relations. Broadly speaking, I want to understand the dynamics of states

operating in systems where resources are finite; existing research has much contradiction in situations where individuals and states fight over slices of an ever-decreasing pie. To that end, Paul Hensel, Sara Mitchell, Elizabeth Nyman, and myself have collaborated on a paper testing the effectiveness of international regimes – the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) and the concept of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) – in promoting sustainable fishing and preventing the outbreak of maritime disputes. We find some support for this; EEZs help states reach agreements in maritime claims and UNCLOS prevents claims and helps states reach third-party agreements.

In the next two years, I plan on submitting the working papers mentioned to selective political science and international relations journals. In the longer term, I would like to pursue two main ideas. One is to further understand the dynamics of domestic terrorism. This will include determining other state-level factors that affect domestic terrorism as well as seeking to connect terrorism to other literature in conflict studies. Second, I wish to analyze how state type affects the characteristics of the natural resources they pursue. In particular, are autocratic states more likely to conflict over diffuse or concentrated resources? One may expect that these types of states may be more likely to focus on the latter given that it is easier to exclude the public and to funnel the proceeds to the leadership. Furthermore are autocratic states that lack access to concentrated resources fundamentally different in their structure than states that do?

While politics may no longer be the answer to every question, I have a wide variety of questions that I seek to apply the tools of political science to. I believe that my research agenda, while diverse, can begin to provide some novel answers to these questions.