Research Statement

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My research clusters on two broad questions. First, how do contextual factors like external threat and conflict influence political attitudes, especially about the government? Second, how do we understand conflict as a process, more broadly? These two questions put my research agenda at the intersection of both the peace science community in international relations and political behavior scholars in comparative politics. These fields appear discrete from each other but my research shows how they overlap. My solo publications in outlets as diverse as *Political Behavior* and *Journal of Peace Research* highlight the potential to get both fields to learn from each other. My methodological approach toward answering these questions is similarly diverse, drawing on tools like mixed effects modeling of hundreds of thousands of individuals from cross-national survey data sets as well as estimating time-series-cross-sectional models of conflict onset and duration. I describe these two agendas in greater detail, outlining my focus, the finished products that have followed, and new research I am doing on these topics.[1]

How Do Conflict and Threat Influence Political Attitudes?

I am best known for my series of publications that explores how contextual factors external to the citizen and the state—like international conflict, terrorism, and even the economy—influence citizen attitudes. The political attitudes that interest me are multiple but I am most concerned in explaining attitudes about the authority the government should have. The attitudes I analyze are eclectic and the contextual factors on which I focus may vary but all my analyses share unifying assumptions that contextual factors of external threat, conflict and macroeconomic downturns constitute a threat to material well-being and induce a sense of mortality. Individuals offset this sense of fear by looking to empower leadership with discretionary authority to provide for their welfare. This offsets the fear of mortality, consistent with insights from psychology, but it has important implications for democracy and our more general understanding of conflict processes.

This was the unifying theme of my dissertation done under the direction of Douglas M. Gibler. My starting point was scholarship on territorial conflict, which the peace science community identified as a particularly salient issue disproportionately responsible for most of our disputes, wars, recurring conflicts, and international rivalries. Territorial conflict is even repsonsible for slowing democratic reforms and consolidating power in the executive. I argued that scholarship that identified disputed territory as a root cause of international conflict and barrier to democratic reforms only captured part of the puzzle. Disputed territory changes political attitudes to favor international conflict and autocratic consolidation.

[1] The research page on my website contains links to additional projects on topics like gun control, human rights, and foreign aid that do not quite fit my overall research agendas. However, they have resulted in a publication in *Social Science Quarterly*, a few other working papers, and some media coverage in outlets like *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, *NBC News*, and *The Washington Post*.

I have since published this dissertation in full. "Individual-level Expectations of Executive Authority under Territorial Threat", published in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, provides the main argument that underpins the dissertation. I argue and show these territorial threats change citizen expectations of the power the executive should have, broadly changing citizen attitudes to favor rule of government by a "strong leader" unencumbered by legislative or electoral oversight. "Territorial Disputes and the Politics of Individual Well-being", published in *Journal of Peace Research*, shows that citizens targeted in a lot of territorial disputes think they have a lower quality of life but citizens in states that initiate a lot of territorial disputes are happier their government is taking efforts to secure the contested good and they report having a higher quality of life as a result. "External Territorial Threats and Tolerance of Corruption: A Private/Government Distinction" might be the most unique chapter from the dissertation. I leveraged three different cross-national data sets to show that territorial threat increases citizen attitudes to favor government corruption but decreases tolerance of corruption in society not involving government actors. This manuscript was recently published in *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*.

I have three other publications that share this theme. "Individual Identity Attachments and International Conflict: The Importance of Territorial Threat", co-authored with Douglas M. Gibler and Marc L. Hutchison in *Comparative Political Studies*, argues that territorial threat influences citizen-level identity attachments. We use Afrobarometer and World Values Survey data to show that citizens in states targeted by territorial threats are more likely to self-identify with their country whereas citizens in states that routinely initiate territorial revisions are more likely to self-identify with their ethnicity. Our within-case analysis of Nigeria demonstrates this spatial variation of identity attachments contingent on proximity to disputed territory.

My other two publications in this research agenda are solo manuscripts that have already created considerable buzz in academic and pundit circles. "Economic Threats or Societal Turmoil? Understanding Preferences for Authoritarian Political Systems", published in *Political Behavior*, contributes to the authoritarian governance literature by proposing both novel measures and formal arguments for why we should expect economic threats or societal conflict to lead to support for authoritarian governments. I find that it is mostly economic downturns that explain these changes in political attitudes, which has resulted in some discussion from those interested in the problem of "democratic deconsolidation" in the wake of the 2008-2009 financial crisis. "The Effect of Terrorism on Judicial Confidence", published in *Political Research Quarterly*, argues terrorism decreases support for judicial independence among countries with independent judiciaries because these important democratic institutions provide legal assurances to terror suspects. This paper is often mentioned on Twitter when, for example, President Trump tweets attacks against the legal system to promote counterterror measures he prefers.

I have several other working projects on this topic, some of which have already generated considerable publicity. "White Outgroup Intolerance and Declining Support for American Democracy", co-authored with Nicholas T. Davis, argues a relationship between whites who see ethnic/racial outgroups as status threats and support for authoritarian governance in the U.S. This paper has been featured in *The New York Times*, *NBC News*, *MacLeans*, and *ThinkProgress* among several other outlets. Other working papers and works in progress focus on how territorial threat influences different domestic political actors to prioritize defense spending and how pro-government violence increases support for authoritarian governments in Sub-Saharan Africa.

How Do We Understand Conflict Processes?

I am a product of the peace science community, a collective of scholars who privilege advanced formal-theoretic and quantitative methods to understand the causes of militarized interstate disputes and the factors that influence the escalation of these disputes to war. My main research agenda has since evolved to explore the overlap of this field with comparative political behavior but my ongoing research still has plenty to contribute to the core mission of this community.

My first few publications sit firmly in this field of scholarship. I worked with Douglas M. Gibler to explore how the territorial conflict literature should encourage us to rethink what we know about the democratic peace. This resulted in two publications, one in *Conflict Management and Peace Science* in 2011 and another in *Journal of Conflict Resolution* in 2013, that show how territorial conflict conditions what we previously knew of how democracies peacefully settle their disputes and how well democracies are able to select cheap and quick disputes. Our collaboration resulted in another project, "External Territorial Threat, State Capacity, and Civil War.", that shows how territorial threat increases state capacity and decreases the likelihood of a civil war over control of government. That was published in *Journal of Peace Research* in 2014.

My most recent contributions to this community and its research questions focus on our conflict data. Douglas M. Gibler, Erin K. Little, and I published a revised version of the Correlates of War (CoW) Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data set in *International Studies Quarterly*. We show an error rate of more than 72% to the most recent version of the MID data (v. 4.01) from which we forked. Our revised version, which we call the GML MID data and host on my website, has important implications for some of our most prominent works that used the CoW-MID data. The results of this project, which we have been doing to gether since 2009, led Gibler and I to rethink conflict as a process to focus less on incidents and more on the demands that states communicate to each other over some issue. This project, titled "What Do Leaders Want? Collecting and Coding Issue Positions and Demands in the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) Data, 1816-2010", resulted in external funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) worth $92,787 for Clemson University.

Curating our GML MID data and my NSF grant will consume my analytical energies for the research I do on this topic. However, I do have a few other works in progress that answer research questions of interest to the peace science community. The first project, tentatively titled "When and Where is the Democratic Peace?", works with two graduate students in the Clemson University Department of Mathematical Sciences to estimate a mixed effects time-series-cross-sectional model with spike-and-slab priors to assess the scope of when (i.e. time periods) and where (i.e. dyads and regions) we can attribute a causal relationship between increasing democracy and the absence of MIDs. I have tentative follow-up plans to follow this model with another that assesses John Vasquez' "steps to war" argument by region and temporal domain, identifying when and where disputed territory was more likely to escalate to war.