1. **Statement of Purpose**
   1. The General Goal

I began my studies at Northwestern in 2019, motivated by adesire to pursue an ambitious research agenda: evaluating the efficacy of international human rights. During the Trump era, whilst the clouds of right-wing populism gathered over much of the Western world, it seemed natural for students of human rights such as myself to interrogate the wisdom and tenability of the movement. Had international human rights institutions—many of which were established following the Second World War, the last high-water mark of radical conservatism—stoked the very politics of grievance that they were designed to neutralize? And even if so, could the movement be bettered and buttressed against the salvos of the reactionaries—many of whom regarded it with contempt, an affront to national sovereignty and to rule of, by, and for the privileged *volk*?

Though not without flaws, the project to realize the lofty ideals propounded by human rights documents and institutions has, in my estimation and on balance, enhanced the human experience. At the very least, it has afforded the world’s oppressed peoples with a *lingua franca* with which to mobilize resistance and to encourage us all to treat others as we would ourselves, lest the horrors of yesteryear recrudesce. So it was that I expressed a desire to tackle such questions, hoping that my research would produce timely defenses against human rights’ detractors or urgent calls for their exponents to improve them—or both.

Five years on, the human rights *problématique* is very much unsettled. Indeed, many of the same forces that gave rise to human rights’ crisis of confidence in the Trump era persist largely unabated. Russia has launched a barbarous war of aggression in Ukraine, arrantly flouting human rights norms and laws with each passing day; Germany’s main nationalist party, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), has enjoyed a stretch of unprecedented support levels, threatening to disrupt the country’s postbellum consensus for multilateralism and morals-based decision-making in international affairs; and Donald Trump himself not only remains the standard-bearer of the Republican Party, but also is its presidential candidate, his sundry and relentless attacks on both democracy and the rule of law notwithstanding. *Inter alia*, these examples underscore how the human rights movement remains under threat and why its present efficacy continues to be a worthwhile subject of inquiry. With my concerns over the future of human rights being unassuaged, for my dissertation, I aim follow the research agenda that I set forth at the outset of my tenure at Northwestern.

What has changed in the interim, however, are my career goals and methodological predilections. The first point is straightforward and merits little discussion herein. Put simply: I no longer desire a career in academia, at least in the near-term. Therefore, what I propose is a project tailored to the “non-academic” job market, a salient consideration insofar as it informs the work I wish to perform and the epistemological postures I ultimately adopt. Relatedly, I intend to avail myself of this opportunity to strengthen and showcase my quantitative skills, namely in data analytics and machine learning. Though I entered this PhD program with a background in the humanities, my methodological interests have drifted in a decidedly “hard” direction, such that I am now pursing Northwestern’s Ad-Hoc Master’s in Applied Statistics—with a sequence in Data Science to boot—and seeking jobs with a strong data-analytics component. As such, my preference for quantitative methods is to be regarded as an instrumental decision, one that will ideally signal my newfound competencies and hence bolster my professional prospects.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* 1. The General Plan

The dissertation I propose belongs to the “three-article” genre of such works. Each chapter aims to evaluate the efficacy of a particular facet of international human rights, with a thematic interest in the nexus of human rights and globalization. This also arises from instrumentalist thinking on my part in the sense that I would like the content of my dissertation to be germane to international trade and policy, two fields that I’m considering entering. Yet I’ve held a keen research interest in the topic for quite some time, beginning with the research proposal I submitted for my International Political Economy (IPE) course and culminating, in some ways, in a recent internship with the U.S. Trade and Development Agency.

The aforementioned “facets” of international human rights I endeavor to explore may be formulated as the following **puzzles**:

1. *How effective are human rights provisions in preferential trade agreements (PTAs)?*
2. *What are the human rights outcomes of bilateral investment treaties (BITs)?*
3. *How robust is human rights discourse to “foreign political investments” (FPIs)?*[[2]](#footnote-2)

As we shall see, the first two topics are similar. *Prima facie*, they both deal with laws regulating types of cross-border economic exchange and their human rights outcomes; yet they are perhaps even more linked by the literature they engage with and the methods they deploy. The third is perhaps the “unlikeliest” of the three, particularly inasmuch as it seeks to appraise neither laws nor particular pieces of scholarship. As I analyze each topic, however, I intend to utilize an array of methods so as to produce the best scholarship possible whilst demonstrating the breadth of my skills.

As to my plan for completing the dissertation, I propose that I follow a simple schedule of completing one chapter per quarter, so that my dissertation is finished and defended by the end of my sixth year. (This is not to preclude the possibility, however, of completing some work for later chapters earlier on.) In this way, I may be positioned to enter the workforce in the summer or fall of 2025. I believe that this timeframe is wholly reasonable given my exceeding progress at this stage (particularly on chapters 1 & 2, as will become apparent) and that few impediments exist from the standpoint of data collection.

Having outlined the impetuses animating my agenda and my general plan for completing the project, I proceed to discuss each chapter in detail, adhering to the following structure:

1. A brief description of the puzzle under exploration.
2. An analysis of the literature at issue (where appropriate), which includes both (brief) summary and criticism.
3. A discussion of work already completed towards the chapter.
4. An enumeration of work I aim to complete and any outstanding questions I hope to address, whether independently or through committee-member feedback.

Moreover, in the interest of pithiness, I shall avoid collating and expanding on all my work completed heretofore. Rather, I aim to summarize what I’ve produced and to offer new insights, whether into my extant work or into areas where no such work yet exists. When the reader may be benefitted from a more complete explanation on my end, I will try to direct them to the relevant documents and/or passages.

1. **Chapter 1: PTAs**
   1. Puzzle: “*How effective are human rights provisions in PTAs?*”

Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) are bi- or multilateral treaties which aim to promote trade between signatory states, at a bare minimum through reduced tariffs.[[3]](#footnote-3) Many of these treaties, however, contain provisions constructed to bolster and protect human rights respect. Such provisions are classified as either “hard” or “soft,” where “[h]ard PTA [provisions] establish enforceable conditions for [economic] integration, while soft [provisions] appeal to voluntary principles of cooperation that do not require behavioral change to receive market access benefits” (Hafner-Burton, 2005, p. 594). In virtue of these provisions’ existence, interrogating the causal relationship between PTAs and human rights outcomes has promised to furnish scholars with at least one piece in the puzzle of international human rights law’s overall efficacy.

To date, two works have attempted to evaluate the efficacy of human rights provisions in PTAs using the methods of causal inference: Hafner-Burton (2005) and Spilker & Böhmelt (2013). Each deserves credit for attempting to put theory and sophisticated quantitative techniques to work to clarify the efficacy of human rights provisions in PTAs, as well as for producing a roadmap of sorts for future scholarship engaging these very questions. ***Nevertheless, both of these works are sufficiently flawed, from a methodological standpoint, so as to merit a rethinking of how the relationship between human rights-infused PTAs and human rights outcomes might be appraised***.

* 1. Literature Review
     1. Summary
        + Hafner-Burton (2005)

The pith of her thesis is that hard PTAs (i.e., those containing hard provisions) *are* effective at improving respect for physical integrity rights among signatory states, whereas soft PTAs (i.e., those containing exclusively soft provisions) and cognate arrangements called HRAs[[4]](#footnote-4) are not; and that this is so on account of the sheer advantage of coercion—hard provisions’ mechanism of influence—over persuasion—soft provisions’ mechanism of influence. **A full summary of her paper can be found in my IPE research proposal**, but what she finds comports with her theory. With a “repression” indicator as her outcome, the coefficient on the hard PTA indicator is negative and statistically significant at the α = 0.05 level, while the coefficients on the soft PTA and HRA indicators are statistically insignificant at said level. Therefore, hard PTAs lead to decreased levels of physical repression, whereas soft PTAs and other HRAs have no effect on physical integrity rights respect. These results hold even under the stress of several robustness checks. As such, and as Hafner-Burton would have it, PTAs with human rights provisions do appear to improve physical integrity rights respect and other human rights outcomes, but *only if* they possess mechanisms enforcing against human rights violations.

* + - * Spilker & Böhmelt (2013)

Gabriele Spilker and Tobias Böhmelt, on the other hand, begin by noting their skepticism of Hafner-Burton’s narrative. Indeed, in “The Impact of Preferential Trade Agreements on Governmental Repression Revisited” (2013), they expressly presuppose that hard PTAs are *unlikely* to have a positive effect on physical integrity rights respect. In their view, states—“being aware of the ‘shadow of the future’”—anticipate “what may happen at the succeeding enforcement stage,” and thus are exceedingly unlikely to accede to hard PTAs if they do not “have a general propensity to abide by human rights in the first place” (p. 357). This means that states electing to join hard PTAs will intrinsically and nonrandomly possess higher levels of physical integrity rights respect, a confounding factor virtually guaranteeing a significant difference in the dependent variable between states party to hard PTAs and those who are not. Put differently, the process whereby states are selected into the hard PTA treatment category—one which states themselves command—is the source of Hafner-Burton’s proposed causal effect, *not* the hard PTA treatment per se, rendering her inference invalid.

To test this hypothesis, Spilker and Böhmelt first reproduce the variables from Hafner-Burton’s 2005 article, availing themselves of the selfsame or updated versions of the datasets from which she drew. They then replicate her results for the sake of comparison, yielding findings that are effectively identical to hers. Most important, though, is how they proceed: by estimating the effect of hard PTA membership on physical integrity rights respect through genetic matching.[[5]](#footnote-5) Through ordered logistic regression, and backed by a raft of robustness checks, their results ultimately lend credence to their theory: the significance of the coefficient on the hard PTA indicator disappears, suggesting that hard PTA membership does *not* affect physical integrity rights respect.

* + 1. Analysis

In the interest of brevity, I offer my criticisms of these papers in the form of a bulleted list, below. **A far more complete discussion can, of course, be found in my IPE research proposal.**

* + - * Hafner-Burton (2005):
        + The instrumental variable—the number of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) to which a given country belonged in the year prior—is likely correlated with several covariates, including TRADE*it*-1, DEMOCRACY*it*-1, and *pc*GDPit-1.
        + The standard of conditional unconfoundedness is unlikely to be met owing to the absence of unit or time fixed effects.
      * Spilker & Böhmelt (2013):
        + Selection bias affects their model as well, since they likewise ignore fixed differences in their matching cases and conducting ordered logit.
      * Both:
        + The main treatments—HARD PTA and SOFT PTA membership—are dichotomous and *ipso facto* overly crude. Namely, there is no way to determine whether a change in human rights respect might’ve resulted (entirely or mainly) from the hard or soft PTAs when a state belonged to each but their membership therein was unequally distributed.
        + The HARD PTA treatment is additionally flawed because its “binariness” elides the fact that some PTAs might be “harder” than others should they contain more enforceable conditions, or entail a greater degree of enforceability.
        + The REPRESSION*it* outcome is constructed from sources that fail to account for instrumentation bias arising from the human rights monitors’ tightening “standard of accountability.” Chris Fariss’s (2014) HR Scores, however, is a physical integrity rights-respect variable that addresses this very problem.
  1. Completed Work

The body of proposals I submitted as part of my IPE research proposal constitutes the great preponderance of work already made on this chapter. Again, to keep my prospectus relatively brief, I summarize my proposals in the list, below, **and fuller discussions can be found in my IPE research proposal.**

* Adopt Fariss’s Human Rights Scores measure as the dependent variable of interest.
* Control for unit and time fixed effects.
* Replace the treatments with variables based on Lisa Lechner’s legalization scores for non-trade issues in PTAs, specifically the scores for political rights (CPR) and economic and social rights (ESR). These scores will be used to compute a “mean legalization” score for each country-year’s PTA portfolio,[[6]](#footnote-6) along with a weighted version that accounts for the proportion of overall foreign trade to which each PTA in a given portfolio contributes.
* Retrieve and/or impute updated versions of the covariates shared by Hafner-Burton, Spilker, and Böhmelt’s models.
* Conduct OLS and lasso regressions, the latter being a key robustness check. For the lasso model, I aim to expand on the original set of covariates by including many of the variables found in the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Dataset and/or Quality of Government (QoG) Standard Dataset. Owing to computational constraints,[[7]](#footnote-7) I may opt to limit these covariates to the “main” set of V-Dem variables. If desirable, however, these constraints may (possibly) be overcome through the use of Northwestern University’s high performance computing system, “Quest.”
* Should a statistically-significant effect of PTAs on human-rights respect be observed, conduct random forests classification to generate the average treatment effect (ATE) of belonging to “harder” PTAs, and random forests regression to determine the rank order of the covariates in predicting HR Scores.

In addition to having formulated my next steps, I have also completed the important step of imputing the most recent observations of HR Scores, whose coverage ceases in 2019, namely through a KNN prediction model.[[8]](#footnote-8) This model was optimal vis-à-vis running HR Scores’ replication data with newer inputs, in my estimation, because some of these inputs (e.g., the CIRI Physical Integrity Rights Index) themselves ceased reporting new data. I have also shown that this prediction model is reasonably accurate, and that it is likely to outperform time-series prediction models.

* 1. Remaining Work and Questions

The most significant work that remains is simply to carry out my analysis as per the steps enumerated above. However, I hope answer (at least some of) the following questions before I begin completing said work in earnest:

* The public version of Lisa Lechner’s dataset has not been updated since 2017, meaning its coverage ends in 2016.[[9]](#footnote-9) If I am unable to procure any kind of updated dataset, would it be feasible for me to do so independently and manually, following the process generally set forth in her article and coding scheme?
* Is there more to be done in the way of eliminating selection bias? Would it be reasonable to introduce Hafner-Burton’s instrument (IGO membership) as a covariate?
* Imai & Kim’s (2020) have found that “[i]t is impossible to simultaneously adjust for unobserved unit-specific and time-specific confounders” (p. 12). Should I deploy two-way fixed effects at all, or should I instead run separate regressions for each type of fixed effect?
* In my Stat-301-1 final project, I discuss how V-Dem’s “Physical Violence Index” (PVI) might be seen as a substitute of sorts for HR Scores. Would it be wise, perhaps, to run robustness check(s) with the PVI as the dependent variable?
* When Steve, J, and I met, we discussed the possibility of building a Vectorized Autoregressive (VAR) model for this chapter. However, I have yet to encounter work illustrating how VARs might be used for causal inference; indeed, what I have read suggests that time series models aren’t necessarily appropriate for this purpose.[[10]](#footnote-10) Does the use of VARs remain a possibility? Is there work to which I can be directed explaining the validity and utility of time-series modeling in causal inference (aside from data imputation)?

1. **Chapter 2: BITs**
   1. Puzzle: “*What are the human rights outcomes of BITs?*”

Bilateral investment treaties (BITs), which aim to promote foreign direct investment (FDI) by expressly conferring rights—including national and most-favored-nation treatment—to international investors,[[11]](#footnote-11) are another class of international economic agreements that have been evaluated for their impact on human rights. Unlike PTAs, BITs do not typically endeavor to uphold human rights standards directly, with “very few, if any […] mention[ing] […] human rights” (Bodea & Ye, 2018, p. 955). Yet many observers have followed the proliferation of BITs with apprehension, viewing the treaties as centering the interests of distant and powerful investors at the expense of domestic stakeholders in developing states—a recipe for human rights abuses on the part of leaders seeking to enforce them. Perhaps the most significant work to date to assess the human rights outcomes of BITs is Bodea and Ye’s “Investor Rights versus Human Rights: Do Bilateral Investment Treaties Tilt the Scale?” (2018), the results of which seem to confirm their hypothesis: BITs worsen human rights respect in developing states,[[12]](#footnote-12) particularly in non-democracies. ***However, as we shall see, their model possesses a good number of shortcomings, such that revisiting the question of how BITs affect human rights outcomes seems warranted.***

* 1. Literature Review
     1. Summary

Bodea and Ye’s hypothesis is predicated on a pair of assumptions as regards BITs’ proximate negative externalities. First, they argue, BITs “[lock] in [the] investor-friendly policies” that developing countries adopt pre-ratification in their regulatory “race to the bottom” to attract FDI, including “low taxes and lax labor standards, or reduc[ed] welfare spending” (2018, pp. 960-61). Second, “BITs constrain government’s choices for sustainable development and welfare improvement” by inhibiting or outright precluding investor-unfriendly policies that states might entertain to achieve these ends, such as increased spending on social benefits and infrastructure, or even expropriation (2018, p. 961). Being more hamstrung in their ability to deliver material gains to their people, these states increasingly face the prospect of mass protests—and become increasingly likely to resort to repression as a solution thereto, given that BITs raise the costs to “address the root causes of popular grievance” (2018, p 963). So it is that BITs are thought to give way to human rights abuses in developing states, especially in non-democracies, where leaders enjoy a low probability of facing accountability for their transgressions.

Bodea and Ye assess their hypothesis with models explicitly inspired by Hafner-Burton (2005) and Spilker & Böhmelt (2013).[[13]](#footnote-13) Their dependent variable is CIRI’s nine-point ordinal “measure of government respect for physical integrity rights” (Bodea & Ye, 2018, p. 964). Furthermore, motivated by a belief that “[t]he more BITs a host state ratifies, the greater the potential for popular grievance and repressive government tactics,” they use as their principal treatment variable a count of the number of BITS to which a country-year was party (2018, p. 965). To appraise the effect of regime type on the relationship between BITs and human rights respect, they also include two additional treatments: (1) POLITY2 (from Polity IV) and (2) an interaction term between POLITY2 and BITS (BITS \* POLITY2).

As to their controls, Bodea and Ye opt for a familiar assortment. Indeed, it mirrors Spilker and Böhmelt’s (2013), which itself derives from Hafner-Burton’s (2005)—featuring HARD PTA, SOFT PTA, and HUMAN RIGHTS RATIFICATION, *inter alia*—whilst including dummy measures of the presence of INTERSTATE WAR and CIVIL WAR, as well as POLITICAL DISSENT, a “[count] of antigovernment protest, riots and general strikes” (Bodea & Ye, 2018, p. 966). Among the controls are also (net) FDI INFLOW, measured as a percentage of GDP, and TRADE OPENNESS, “the [logged] sum of a state’s total exports and imports as a share of [GDP]” (Bodea & Ye, 2018, p. 965).[[14]](#footnote-14) They execute this model using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, though they also run variations of said model with two instruments that attempt to capture competitive pressures potentially prompting BIT accession: (1) “[an] average of the total ratified BITs in neighboring [country-years],” and (2) “[a] three-year lagged total of new BITs ratified by other countries” (2018, p. 968). In all instances, as alluded to previously, their findings comport with their priors: the coefficients on BITS are negative and statistically significant, suggesting that belonging to more BITs does decrease human rights respect, while the coefficients on the interaction term BITS \* POLITY2 is positive and statistically significant, implying that the negative relationship between BIT membership and human rights respect is, at the very least, likely nonexistent in democracies.

* + 1. Analysis

Bodea and Ye’s choice of a spatially-determined instrument (see instrument 1, above) is intriguing, one that suggests new avenues for acquiring and demonstrating quantitative skills—a core goal of my dissertation. I will return to this point later; but for now, I shall discuss the missteps that I see as undermining the integrity of Bodea and Ye’s work. Of course, we have already seen how HARD PTA and SOFT PTA are likely crude measures of the concepts they seek to operationalize. What is more concerning in the context of this piece, however, is that they—along with HUMAN RIGHTS RATIFICATION—are used as controls at all. As we know, it is generally understood that, if a researcher is to manually include a covariate in a regression model, then they should have reason to suspect that it is a confounder—that is, a variable possibly affecting realized values in the treatment and outcome, simultaneously yet independently. Though the potential relationship between PTA membership and BIT membership seems intuitive—states keen to increase trade with international partners through PTAs surely hold similar attitudes with respect to encouraging FDI via BITs—it is not immediately clear what the connection between *human rights commitments* and BITs might be. This is especially so given that they at no point defend their inclusion of HARD PTA, SOFT PTA, and HUMAN RIGHTS RATIFICATION.

Bodea and Ye do, however, explicitly agree with Hafner-Burton in that, with respect to international agreements, only “hard” provisions can reliably condition state behavior.[[15]](#footnote-15) Perhaps they included these variables, then, to test for the possibility that human rights commitments—particularly enforceable ones, such as those found in hard PTAs—constrain states’ ability to utilize repression when BIT-related popular dissatisfaction materializes, thereby reducing some states’ likelihood of acceding to BITs in the first place. Nevertheless, the use of these covariates appears flawed, largely for reasons we have already seen. From Spilker and Böhmelt (2013), we have reason to believe that states ratify hard PTAs generally when they expect to comply with their provisions—to wit, when states already tend to respect human rights. Thus, HARD PTA—and, to a lesser extent, SOFT PTA and HUMAN RIGHTS RATIFICATION—might well possess a reverse-causal relationship with the dependent variable, CIRI. What’s more, as I have shown, HARD PTA and SOFT PTA are in all likelihood overly crude and—perforce—inaccurate measures of the concepts they purport to capture. Finally, HARD PTA and SOFT PTA are problematic in view of Bodea and Ye’s instruments. Indeed, as we have already discussed, instruments are valid when they correlate *exclusively* with the treatment; however, it seems probable that the competitive pressures influencing states to join BITs likewise motivate PTA membership, a concept at least partially captured by HARD PTA and SOFT PTA. *In toto*, these considerations cast doubt on the wisdom of including human-rights-commitment variables in the manner that Bodea and Ye adopt.

A significant consequence of my final observation above—that there may exist correlations between at least some of the controls and the instruments—intimates that the instruments themselves lack steady footing. In fact, one may reasonably suspect that each of the instruments are correlated with FDI INFLOW and TRADE OPENNESS, specifically: a country’s openness to international investment and trade may motivate competitor states (whether neighbors or not) to match or surpass their openness, perhaps by acceding to increasing numbers of BITs, and vice versa. If so, the extent of correlation between the controls and instruments would seem far-reaching, rendering the use of instruments especially unsuitable for their model.

Another key flaw in Bodea and Ye’s model that is perhaps unsurprising by now is their dependent variable, for CIRI is undercut by the same instrumentation bias as that found in the dependent variables of Hafner-Burton (2005) and Spilker & Böhmelt (2013).[[16]](#footnote-16) A problem requiring more in the way of elaboration, however, is that of Bodea and Ye’s main treatment, BITS. As aforementioned, BITS is a count of country-year BIT membership, and its use derives from the hypothesis that belonging to more BITs increases the likelihood of protests and hence repressive acts on the part of the state. Yet it is not apparent, in my estimation, why we should expect this claim to be true. By way of example, consider the following. Developing country *X* belongs to ten BITs. *X*’s ten co-signatories, however, are generally small or poor; it is thus likely that their cumulative investments in *X* may only marginally undermine the interests of *X*’s domestic stakeholders. On the other hand, developing country *Y* belongs exclusively to a BIT with the United States, which by contrast is an exceedingly large and wealthy country. The magnitude and depth of investments being made by American entities in *Y* is therefore far more likely to unsettle domestic stakeholders. In such a scenario, we can reasonably expect to see a greater probability of repression in *Y* than in *X*, even though the former belongs to far fewer BITs than the latter. As such, there is sufficient reason to believe that BITS misses variation *between* BITs with respect to the investment flows they facilitate—a concept which, if well-operationalized, might be conducive towards more robust findings.

* 1. Completed Work

Bodea & Ye’s use of instruments does not appear justifiable, as aforementioned; yet this is not to suggest the same about spatial modeling more generally. Recall that the first of these instruments is the mean number of BITs ratified by each country-year’s neighbors, with a “neighbor” being defined as a country “shar[ing] a land border or […] separated by 12 miles of water or less” (Bodea & Ye, 2018, p. 968). Accepting the presupposition that states are in competition with one another over a scarcity of economic gains—and that this may be especially so among neighbors, who may share similar resources, political or business cultures, and more—we may consider such a spatial variable to be a useful control, at the very least. Additionally, emphasizing spatial data analysis in this chapter may advance my overarching agenda of demonstrating my methodological virtuosity. To this end, we may also consider the use of spatial techniques for variables besides the cumulative BITs counts (i.e., the treatments), including the dependent variable and the controls.

In my final project for Stat-302 (Data Visualization), I began laying the groundwork for the use of spatial data analysis in this chapter. In particular, I set about computing spatially-weighted scores for a number of *ad rem* variables, including Bodea & Ye’s treatments, and determining the intensity of spatial clustering therein, namely by computing the statistic “Global Moran’s *I*” over time. In brief, my work evinced spatial clustering in the cumulative BITs counts (treatments) and HR Scores (my intended outcome), but not in the POLITICAL DISSENT variable. These results held irrespective of whether one adopted a strict or lax rule for neighborhood membership (12 miles or 200 kilometers, respectively). Therefore, it would seem appropriate to at least strongly consider these weighted scores’ inclusion as controls. Given my observation of clustering in the treatments and outcomes, the following models may at least be considered as candidates for my work:

1. Spatial Autoregressive Model (SAR): includes as a control a spatially-lagged version of the outcome,
2. Spatially-lagged X Model (SLX): includes as a control a spatially-lagged version of the right-hand side variables,
3. Spatial Error Model (SEM): includes as a control a spatially-lagged version of the error terms,
4. Spatial Durbin Model (SDM): combines the features of SAR and SLX,
5. Spatial Durbin Model (SDEM): combines the features of SLX and SEM.

In the process of completing this project, I also analyzed Bodea & Ye’s replication files, running them in Stata, with which the code for the models was exclusively compatible. I was surprised to find a yawning gap between the number of observations in the dataset and that which remained after running the first, main model: 7261 and 2679, respectively. Bodea & Ye do not discuss means of imputing missing data in their article, and it would appear, in my estimation, that no attempt at doing so was ever performed. This raises further doubts about the robustness of their findings, especially if nonrandom processes may explain how the missing observations failed to participate in the final regression.

* 1. Remaining Work and Questions

Although significant progress has been made towards this chapter—namely, the preliminary analysis of spatial clustering and review of the replication data—a good deal of work obviously remains. The primary next steps I seek to accomplish include:

1. Gathering data for newer country-year observations, since Bodea & Ye’s dataset ends in 2010,
2. Finishing to determine which variables might justifiably be spatially lagged,
3. Selecting which spatial models to use,
4. Selecting which treatments and what covariates to use,
5. Selecting which regression model(s) to use (e.g., OLS, lasso, etc.),
6. Selecting an imputation method.

The first task is the easiest, since Bodea & Ye provide their sources for their variables. In fact, I’ve already commenced this work by downloading and analyzing the most recent observations for the POLITICAL DISSENT variable.[[17]](#footnote-17) The second also seems generally simple insofar as I may, at a minimum, continue my work computing Global Moran’s *I* for the remaining covariates. However, I do have questions involving *Local* Moran’s *I*, namely whether it may also be leveraged as a means of locating spatial clustering for the purposes of my project. This, along with identifying the most appropriate spatial model(s), is something which consultations with my committee members may especially benefit.

In discussing the shortcomings of Bodea & Ye’s model, above, I expressed how a better *treatment*—one that accounts for the relative importance of individual BITs, rather than a simple cumulative count—may be helpful. Formulating such a treatment (at the very least to supplement the originals) should be simple; indeed, one approach may be to sum, for every country-year, the (logged) GDP of every country belonging to said country-year’s portfolio of BITs. In my Stat-302 final project, I also discuss the problem of instrumentation bias in the POLITICAL DISSENT variable. In finalizing my right-hand side variables, then, it might be worth seeking out a more reliable indicator of anti-government unrest, perhaps with the V-Dem dataset as a starting point. The V-Dem dataset may be of further use as a source of additional covariates, particularly should I opt for a model (whether as a baseline or as a robustness check) that lends itself to a more “kitchen-sink” approach to variable inclusion, such as a lasso regression. The final hurdle I will need to clear—imputing missing values—is one wherein I’d appreciate input. I suspect most would recommend the method of multiple imputation, but I do have concerns that it may not be feasible in view of computational constraints (i.e., if the scale of missingness in the explanatory variables is relatively high), or in the event that I opt to carry out non-OLS models.

1. **Chapter 3: FPIs**
   1. Puzzle: “*How robust is human rights discourse to FPIs?*”

Perhaps the most remarkable—if divisive—development in the recent history of sports has been the emergence of the Middle East as a locus of influence. In 2022, Qatar, a small nation lacking a record of sporting success or existing requisite infrastructure, hosted the FIFA Men’s World Cup, an honor conferred not only under a cloud of bribery accusations,[[18]](#footnote-18) but also notwithstanding the country’s well-documented mistreatment of migrant workers, women, the LGBTQ+ community, and political dissidents.[[19]](#footnote-19) A year prior, and in the wake of the brutal assassination of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) completed its takeover of Premier League outfit Newcastle United—a move met with opprobrium on the part of rival clubs and human rights monitors yet near-universal support by Newcastle’s fans.[[20]](#footnote-20) More recently, the Saudi Pro League, under the aegis of the PIF,[[21]](#footnote-21) has waged an unprecedented campaign to attract the world’s best talent. In 2023 alone, Saudi teams signed Ballon d’Or winners Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema (and other superstars such as Neymar and Sadio Mané) to contracts befitting Croesus.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Most alarming to officials on the western shores of the Atlantic, however has been Saudi Arabia’s foray into the world of golf. In 2021, the PIF formed LIV Golf as a competitor to the Florida-based PGA Tour, luring away such marquee athletes as Phil Mickelson and Dustin Johnson. Though their early relationship was unflaggingly litigious and acrimonious—PGA commissioner Jay Monahan even invoked Saudi Arabia’s putative involvement in the events of 11 September to cast aspersions on his organization’s upstart adversary—the two leagues abruptly agreed in June 2023 to a merger. The surprising truce prompted immediate and ongoing scrutiny from lawmakers, who have not only convinced the Justice Department to launch a probe into the matter on antitrust grounds, but also vociferously condemned its optics: a storied American institution willingly entwining its destiny with an autocratic regime infamous for its insouciance towards human rights norms.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In these and other instances,[[24]](#footnote-24) detractors have leveled against Middle Eastern states the charge of “sportswashing”—“the practice,” according to Cambridge Dictionary, “of an organization, a government, a country, etc. supporting sports or organizing sports events as a way to improve its reputation.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Spokespeople for the criticized have downplayed the sportswashing accusation, ascribing their governments’ unprecedented investments in athletics to the more anodyne motives of tourism-promotion or peace-building.[[26]](#footnote-26) Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement among academics,[[27]](#footnote-27) human rights monitors,[[28]](#footnote-28) and the press[[29]](#footnote-29) that countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia are indeed gaining purchase in the international sporting landscape for political advantage.

Irrespective of whether the “sportwashing” label is appropriate or not, what is perhaps most concerning about these investments is not that they may successfully burnish the reputations of human rights “disrespecting” states, per se, but that they may ultimately erode commitments—both rhetorical and actual—to human rights norms by the targeted states more generally. The case of the PGA and LIV Golf is especially edifying: not only did Jay Monahan go on to jettison his prior misgivings about human-rights respect in agreeing to the merger, but the aforementioned Phil Mickelson was also caught on-record explicitly dismissing Jamal Khashoggi’s murder as a barrier to business—an infelicitous statement that forced him to apologize and clarify that he “[doesn’t] condone human rights violations at all.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Of course, golf players and administrators do not dictate state policy, but they are constituents nonetheless of the legislators who do; and in aggregate, constituency-wide shifts in attitudes towards human rights may effectuate corresponding changes among policymakers. Moreover, legislators may be targets of influence from foreign actors more directly, whether through lobbying,[[31]](#footnote-31) foreign direct investment (FDI) in the communities they serve,[[32]](#footnote-32) and even outright election interference.[[33]](#footnote-33) Along with sportswashing, these tactics may be considered instances of “foreign political investments” (FPIs)—expenditures of resources originating from a foreign state that seek to gain soft or hard leverage within the target state. ***Ultimately, what I seek to evince is not whether sportswashing or other FPIs succeed in this strict sense, but whether, being subjected to such activities, target states witness a deterioration in the quality of their human rights discourse—particularly that which pertains to the “targeting” states.*** Such a deterioration in “rights talk” may nonetheless be seen as a precondition for FPI success.

***In order to demonstrate my newly-acquired German-language skills, and to render my study more tractable, I aim to complete this chapter with Germany as a case study***. Germany is an interesting case in its own right, especially in view of its long and complex relationship with Russia, a state well-known for its high levels of repression. Of course, the erstwhile East Germany (GDR) belonged to the Soviet alliance for the duration of the Cold War, and affinities for Russia have remained relatively strong in the region in the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall.[[34]](#footnote-34) As Germany reunited and assumed the mantle of moral leadership in Europe, it elected to engage with authoritarian states under a policy of *Wandel durch Handel* (WdH): change through trade. The motivating logic of this strategy was that authoritarian states, upon becoming economically intertwined with Germany, would gradually acculturate to its democratic and liberal institutions. WdH was perhaps nowhere more prominent or consequential than in Germany’s relationship with Russia, who came to be the main supplier of Germany’s gas.[[35]](#footnote-35) Underscoring this dependence was the sponsorship of FC Schalke 04, one of Germany’s most recognizable soccer clubs, by Gazprom, Russia’s state-owned energy firm. Germany maintained its cozy relationship with Russia even in the face of the latter’s increased aggression—Chancellor Angela Merkel, in fact approved the Nord Stream 2 pipeline after Russia had illegally seized Crimea.[[36]](#footnote-36) It was only in the aftermath of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 that German policymakers finally reappraised the wisdom and efficacy of WdH, and ultimately abandoned it with respect to Russia.

It stands to reason that, during the pre-2022 era of reproachment, criticisms from German policymakers of Russia’s respect for human rights might have been relatively tempered. If so, this may have resulted from a prevailing aversion to upsetting either WdH or “the hand that feeds” (or both). Nevertheless, as a supposed champion of democratic and liberal values, Germany remains a place where we ought to detect revulsion (or at least displeasure) towards major violations of human rights, such as Russia’s seizure of Crimea. ***If we don’t, then we may have preliminary evidence of Russian FPIs deleteriously affecting human rights discourse in Germany. I suspect that this may be confirmed in a number of ways, including:***

1. ***Case-study analyses of policymakers whose language towards Russia didn’t change (or changed very little) in the wake of these “shocks,” perhaps to determine the extent of their “linkage” with Russia,***
2. ***Comparing policymakers’ language towards other human rights “disrespectors” (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc.) before and after their own “shocks” (e.g., the murder of Jamal Khashoggi). Assuming that Germany (or individual lawmakers) is less dependent on these states than it was on Russia—a variable for which we may be able to control—it may be reasonable for us to see a greater “jump” in critical language towards these states than towards Russia.***
   1. Literature Review

To the best of my knowledge, there are no extant works that examine changes to human rights discourse, or language used towards other states, in the context of the kinds of “shocks” I’ve described. At this stage, the most important work I’ve located is Remschel & Kroeber’s “Every Single Word: A New Data Set Including All Parliamentary Materials Published in Germany” (2022). The article introduces a novel corpus of “all written communication published by the German Bundestag between 1949 and 2017” (p. 276). Though the dataset ends in 2017, newer documents may be scraped from the German Bundestag’s website.[[37]](#footnote-37) Because this data is so readily available, and as its authors are so significant as contributors to and indicators of the country’s discourse with respect to other states, I aim to focus on ***discourse in the Bundestag*** as my primary outcome.

Of course, I’m continuing to search for literature germane to this topic or that rely on text-as-data methods, and I welcome recommendations from my committee members and others towards this end.

* 1. Completed Work

I’ve obviously completed less work on this chapter relative to my work on chapters 1 and 2. Even so, the above demonstrates that I’ve at least acquired the data that will constitute the basis of my outcome variable: parliamentary sentiment towards Russia and perhaps others. Collecting potential covariates, such as those capturing economic dependence (e.g., foreign trade flows, FDI flows, etc.), shouldn’t pose too great a difficulty either. I’ve looked into sources that might provide statistics on lobbying—another potential avenue for FPI—but the most official source, the Bundestag’s “Lobbyregister,” is a new innovation, having launched in 2022, and is therefore not particularly useful as a wellspring of data. Here is also where recommendations from committee members may prove helpful in pointing me to similar (or better) sources.

Importantly, I’ve also completed the necessary task of learning text-as-data methods; indeed, I took two courses on the topic for my Political Science coursework, and I’ve been introduced to newer packages through my Data Science sequence. Accordingly, I should already have developed the baseline competency for producing the sentiment-score outcome.

* 1. Remaining Work & Questions

Of course, I have much yet to do on this chapter, but the following issues are ones I deem to be more pressing, and on which I’d very much appreciate committee-member feedback:

* What is my hypothesis, in clear terms? Relatedly, is such a hypothesis necessary, particularly if the goal of this chapter is not causal inference but instead the establishment of a strong correlation establishment? (Jordan has suggested this as a potential chapter objective.)
* I’m assuming that my “treatment” variables will be the “shocks” I’ve already adduced (e.g., the seizure of Crimea). How would I select these events in a systematic way? Relatedly, how should I select my covariates?
* For the dependent variable: am I biting off more than I can chew in proposing to analyze discourse in the Bundestag more broadly and at the level of individual MPs? Does a mixed-methods, case study approach towards individual MPs seem sensible or feasible? Also, does it seem reasonable to compare changes in sentiment between different human-rights disrespecting countries (e.g., Russia and Saudi Arabia) in response to different shocks (e.g., Crimea and Khashoggi)?
* I’m assuming that my model(s) would ultimately be a regression discontinuity design (RDD) or difference in differences (DD). Based on what I’ve shared and/or what the committee members may feel, is there any particular model that’s preferable, here? I don’t think I’ve ever carried out either model, so it would be helpful to see seminal uses of each.

1. That is, my preference is not to be regarded as a product of a belief in the superiority of quantitative methods, per se. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Henceforth, I will refer to “preferential trade agreements,” “bilateral investment treaties,” and “foreign political investments” by their acronyms. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Congressional Budget Office (2016, pp. 1-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. HRAs, or “human rights agreements,” are a broad category of treaties designed to “[encourage] repressors” to better their human rights respect without the use of mechanisms enforcing against defection (Hafner-Burton, 2005, pp. 593-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A full description of genetic matching appears in my IPE research proposal in the footnote corresponding to this one. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As a robustness check, and following Hafner-Burton (2005), I will also interact the mean legalization score with per-capita GDP and population. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Namely, the need to impute a significant number of missing values, and the inclusion of large numbers of covariates. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See my Stat-301-2 final project. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See <https://www.designoftradeagreements.org/downloads/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example, <https://otexts.com/fpp3/causality.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/bilateral_investment_treaty> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Their universe of cases is indeed limited to “developing countries.” See Bodea & Ye (2018, p 964). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Indeed, see Bodea & Ye (2018, p. 965). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For more, see Bodea & Ye (2018, pp. 965-67). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Bodea & Ye (2018, p. 959). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Indeed, Fariss (2014) gives the CIRI index as a paradigmatic example. See Fariss (2014, p. 298). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See my Stat-302 final project, section… [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/sports/soccer/qatar-and-russia-bribery-world-cup-fifa.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/14/qatar-rights-abuses-stain-fifa-world-cup> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 97% support. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/53662771>. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The four best teams are 75%-owned by the PIF; <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/4581869/2023/06/05/saudi-arabia-pif-pro-league/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. CITE CONTRACTS [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/06/15/pga-tour-liv-golf-merger-justice-department-to-investigate.html> <https://www.blumenthal.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/blumenthal-opens-probe-into-pga-tour-and-liv-golf-agreement> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Cases I didn’t discuss include Manchester City and Paris St.-Germain [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/sportswashing> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See, for instance, Saudi Prince Abdulaziz’s defense in *60 Minutes*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/saudi-arabia-sportswashing-accusations-60-minutes-transcript-2023-04-09/> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Skey (2023) and many others. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Qatar: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/14/qatar-rights-abuses-stain-fifa-world-cup> Saudi: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/17/saudi-government-uses-european-football-sportswash-its-reputation> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/14/opinion/world-cup-qatar-sportswashing.html>, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/02/21/saudi-sportswashing-golf-pga-liv/>, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jun/08/phil-mickelson-liv-golf-series-pga-tour-players-saudi-arabia> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. <https://www.opensecrets.org/fara> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/4375454/2023/04/06/saudi-newcastle-boris-government/> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/03/world/americas/canada-china-2021-election.html>, also Russia & U.S. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cite polls, Russian-language abilities of Merkel et al., etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-did-germany-fare-without-russian-gas/> [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. <https://www.politico.eu/article/blame-germany-russia-policy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/protokolle/plenarprotokolle> [↑](#footnote-ref-37)