Research Statement
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My research addresses two broad questions. First, what bilateral processes or characteristics promote peaceful relations between disputing countries? Second, what is the role of third-parties in peacefully (or diplomatically) ending specific conflict episodes or transforming a conflictive relationship between countries into one that is more peaceful? The substantive focus of these questions places my research at the intersection of the subfields of international conflict and cooperation (including conflict management) and touches upon topics as diverse as interstate rivalries, territorial disputes, democratization, human rights, international law, international organizations, and such conflict management methods as bilateral negotiations, mediation, arbitration, and peacekeeping (as opposed to more coercive strategies, such as sanctions or military intervention). In pursuit of these questions, I advance and test theoretical arguments primarily using large-*n* quantitative analysis (though my work is beginning to include some qualitative components as well). These broad questions have given rise to two related research programs, each of which has produced successfully published products. Below, I describe these two research agendas in greater detail. I also outline my future research plans for each of the mentioned projects along the way.

International Border Agreements

One of the most robust empirical findings in international relations is that democratic states do not fight one another. Recently, however, this democratic peace proposition has been challenged by an alternative explanation: the territorial peace proposition.[1] This latter proposition maintains that when interstate borders are not settled (that is, a salient external threat exists), domestic pressures prevent democratization and encourage the militarization of foreign policy. When borders settle, however, these pressures change, thereby increasing the likelihood of democratization and peace. Thus, the democratic peace, according to this perspective, may be an artifact of the status of interstate borders, which affect both democracy and peace.

My research joins this ongoing, vibrant debate. In "Signing Up for Peace: International Boundary Agreements, Democracy, and Militarized Interstate Conflict" (published in *International Studies Quarterly*), I study the theoretical relationship between international border delineation agreements on the one hand and the occurrence of conflict and its escalation on the other. After collecting original data on international border agreements signed during the period 1816-2001, I test the argument (and find) that border agreements significantly reduce the likelihood of both the occurrence of interstate conflict (over *any* issue) and its escalation. The project therefore demonstrates a key mechanism by which bilateral negotiations between neighboring states can produce more peaceful interstate relations. It also fits into current scholarly debates concerning the relative contributions of democracy and settled borders to interstate peace. A current, separate project investigates these relative contributions in greater detail ("Is the Democratic Peace Conditional? Testing the Relative Merits of the Democratic and Territorial Peace Propositions;" under review). Nonetheless, this initial manuscript has produced numerous fruitful avenues of research, for it also uncovers empirical relationships between border agreements and both: a)

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[1] See Douglas Gibler, *The Territorial Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

democracy, and b) interstate rivalries (competitions). Subsequent manuscripts now theorize about and research these latter relationships in greater detail.

In "Democratization and International Border Agreements" (published in the *Journal of Politics*), I extend the territorial peace argument to explain theoretically how border agreements might contribute *directly* to democratization processes that occur within states. I propose and find that once states sign agreements that delineate *all* of their external borders, they democratize significantly. Furthermore, not only do institutions become more democratic after border agreements (e.g., by placing greater constraints on executive authority or granting greater civilian control over the military), but states also treat their citizenry in ways more consistent with democratic values. After such agreements, for example, states respect both political and economic human rights more, and treat women (in particular) better as well. Each of these effects, however, disappears if at least one border remains un-delimited. This supports the general territorial peace argument and suggests that border agreements may play a significant role in the democratization process. Future work aims to understand this role better.

A second series of projects (with Toby J. Rider) investigates the role of unsettled borders in producing, sustaining, and ending interstate rivalries (e.g., conflictive relationships between India and Pakistan or Israel and its neighbors). More specifically, we advance a territorial theory of rivalry, in which we propose that unsettled borders generate a commitment problem (i.e., a situation in which states cannot agree to honor tomorrow an agreement reached today because of potential shifts in relative power). This commitment problem impedes the signing of interstate border agreements, generates feelings of enmity and competition, and therefore, produces rivalry. In "Territory, Border Settlement, and Rivalry Processes" (revise and resubmit invitation), we find that when neighboring states have not delineated their mutual border(s) through an international agreement, they are at greater risk of developing a rivalry. Furthermore, we uncover direct evidence of the commitment problem mechanism, as the border territory that produces such commitment problems generally involves strategic or economic value (i.e., a potential source of power). Our current project now advances an argument for how states overcome the commitment problem we identify to successfully conclude border agreements, and I recently finished collecting original data about *the process* by which states reach border agreements (i.e., the technique used, time span of negotiations, and involvement of third-parties) so that we may test this argument. Finally, in "Clearing the Hurdle: Border Settlement and Rivalry Termination" (published in the *Journal of Politics*), we argue that the border agreement serves as a behavioral indicator that rivals have solved the commitment problem. We find that after such agreements, former rivals are more likely to resolve their rivalry. Yet even if the rivalry does not end, we propose and find that rivals behave differently toward one another after signing a border agreement with one another. Any disputes or crises that arise are less severe and of shorter duration than those that preceded the agreement. Ultimately, we plan to expand upon this argument and create a book proposal in the coming years.

Finally, because we do not yet understand much about *how* borders settle, I have begun investigating the settlement mechanism in more detail through four projects. First, an ongoing project (on rivalry; see above) theorizes about and investigates the process by which neighboring states successfully delineate their mutual borders. A second project, "the Spatial Diffusion of Border Agreements" (with Chad Clay; under review), considers a separate mechanism by which borders settle: diffusion. States maintain that they cannot negotiate over border territory. Yet they sometimes reach agreement with a neighbor about this territory. We argue that such an agreement, because it cannot easily be concluded or abrogated (once created), serves as a costly signal of the willingness and ability of the signatory states to negotiate over border territory. This assures other neighbors

that concessions (and therefore successful negotiations) are possible, thereby encouraging further negotiation and additional border agreements. After controlling for alternative explanations, we find support for this diffusion argument. The third project (with Krista Wiegand and Thorin Wright; in progress) examines the role of state leadership (and its turnover) in border settlement. Finally, cognizant that in-depth case analysis might better uncover the detailed mechanism by which border settlement occurs, a fourth project involves studying public opinion through field work in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom. In this project, entitled "From Contestation to Acceptance: How Border Agreements Emerge in Conflict-Torn Societies" (new project with a graduate student, John Willingham), we propose two mechanisms by which public opinion and leaders might interact to create opportunities for border settlement. Testing these alternative arguments involves interviewing officials and citizens to understand whether leaders or the public drove the process by which Ireland shifted from its constitutionally stated desire for unification (i.e., border contestation) to accepting the Good Friday Agreements (i.e., border settlement). To pursue this research, I received a $10,000 grant from the University of Georgia for fieldwork in May/June 2014 and anticipate returning to Ireland in 2015.

Conflict Management

Elements of conflict management (e.g., negotiations or the role of third-parties on the border settlement process) appear in the above research program. Yet my interest in conflict management extends beyond the border dispute context in three noteworthy ways. First, my dissertation, *Paths to Peace: Conflict Management Trajectories in Militarized Interstate Disputes*, breaks with previous research to theorize directly about the (potential) interdependence between conflict management attempts undertaken by third-parties. I propose that a third-party actor is aware of previous attempts to manage a given conflict in which it becomes involved *and* that the third-party accounts for these previous attempts when deciding what to do next to manage that conflict. This project has so far produced two publications and one working manuscript. I outline the conceptual origins of my position in a recent manuscript, entitled "Conflict Management Trajectories in Militarized Interstate Disputes: A Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Foundations" (published in *International Studies Review*). A second working paper, "Conflict Management Trajectories: Explaining the Evolution of Conflict Management in Militarized Interstate Disputes," then advances four competing theoretical explanations of interdependence among conflict management efforts and conducts an empirical evaluation of them. Finally, I conduct a forecasting exercise using the trajectory concept in a recent publication at *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. I expect to expand these arguments and analyses into a book project in the coming years.

A second set of projects theorizes about the factors that facilitate mediation's occurrence and success. In "Conflict Management Efforts of Allies in Interstate Disputes" (published at *Foreign Policy Analysis*), Derrick Frazier and I advance a novel argument for a state's willingness to mediate their allies' disputes. Traditional studies in this area discuss the conflict-promoting potential of alliances, particularly as states combine their military resources in order to prevent or succeed in war. Yet there are theoretical reasons to believe that allies may actively mediate (as third-parties in) their partner's disputes to promote the peaceful management of those disputes. The theoretical logic that we outline hinges on the integrity of alliance institutions. Through serving as a mediator, allies can protect their investment in the alliance - by preventing the activation (and therefore use) of alliance resources or by restoring the alliance to its originally intended purpose. This implies that conflict management behavior will vary according to the depth of alliance commitments, which is precisely what we find. Allies that have deeper commitments with one another mediate more frequently than

those with no or shallower commitments. We also uncover regional effects, as states within the same region as the disputants mediate more often than those outside the region. Our work, which appears in *International Negotiation*, theorizes about and studies these regional dynamics in greater depth.

Finally, I am pursuing a project that further bridges the two broad research programs outlined above. My research on border agreements suggests that states handle certain types of territorial disputes (i.e., those over border territory) differently than territorial disputes over non-border areas. Sara McLaughlin-Mitchell and I, in a manuscript entitled "Why Conflict Management Strategies Vary Across Different Contentious Issues" (working manuscript), investigate this possibility further. We argue that states should employ different strategies to manage conflicts over different types of territory (borders/land, rivers, and maritime space). This expectation derives both from the relative saliency of the territory and the international regimes (i.e., norms and institutions) that developed around and subsequently guide how states are expected to manage each of these distinct claim types. Preliminary evidence confirms our expectations. Future research projects may expand upon these arguments to explore how state interests, international regimes, and relative power interact to affect the management of various territorial claims.