

## **Statement of Research Interests**

My research interests lie both in comparative politics and international relations. Within the domain of international relations, my research focuses on regional organizations, trade agreements and non-traditional foreign policy approaches by smaller states. My most recent work details the idiosyncratic success of ASEAN as a super enabler. I am also working on a Taiwanese government funded fellowship research project that explores the potential impact of Taiwan's nontraditional foreign policy towards the global south as well as the impact of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative on regional organizations in South and South-East Asia.

Within the realm of comparative politics, I am interested in democratization, authoritarianism, institutional design and regime survival. I am particularly interested in unpacking how senior bureaucracy plays an active role in the process of democratization. My dissertation research puts forth a framework that explains the potential of whether a nascent democracy will backslide or consolidate based on bureaucratic quality & ruling coalition relationships.

### **Dissertation Project**

My dissertation project explores how the quality of bureaucracy and its relationship to the ruling coalition determine the success of democratization in nascent democracies. I argue that as system elites, who possess elaborate operational knowledge of institutions and state functions, senior bureaucracy aims to negotiate a relationship with the ruling coalition that safeguards their interests, i.e., it maintains institutional integrity and autonomy. In such a relationship, senior bureaucracy designs and implements policy while the ruling coalition decides on the strategic direction. In instances where this relationship is under threat and the quality of bureaucracy deteriorates, democratization efforts will come to a halt and backslide. Through extensive fieldwork in Turkey, Pakistan, and Taiwan, I present a detailed network analysis as evidence to support my argument. In the process, I also introduce a classification of system designs based on historical process tracing. My dissertation project concludes by positing that a high quality nonpartisan bureaucracy is the lynchpin of governance and necessary for democratization to be successful.

My dissertation project is laid out in a book format, it starts with an extensive literature review on the subject followed by my theory chapter wherein I introduce my theory of bargained democratic consolidation. The chapter defines key terms such as bureaucratic quality, nature of the relationship between institutions and presents a theoretical framework. I apply my theoretical framework to three case studies; Pakistan, Turkey and Taiwan. Using social network analysis based on original data collected through extensive fieldwork in all three countries over a period of 18 months, I test my theory in each case and posit evidence of my argument that bureaucracy does play a critical role in successful democratization efforts. I conclude my dissertation by analyzing

each case and the potential generalizability of my theory to suggest that democracy can only be sustained with a consistent strengthening of bureaucracy and ensuring its autonomy.

### **Other Research**

I am currently working on various other research projects in addition to my dissertation. One of them is the Taiwan Fellowship funded project that analyzes the potential impact of the recent change in foreign policy strategy of Taiwan from monetary aid to cultural/educational outreach.

Another project explores how the new Chinese 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) initiative can potentially push regional reorganizations like South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) into irrelevance.

I am also working on a co – authored paper that looks at campaign rhetoric used in the US and French elections. The paper relies on data scrapped from twitter feeds of major political candidates, to argue that in instances where the government has more social protections for its citizens like worker compensation and health care systems, inflammatory rhetoric is not as useful as it would be in cases where its not. The paper posits that right – wing inflammatory rhetoric worked better in the US than France because of this reason. An iteration of this paper was presented at MPSA 2018 in Chicago.

### **Future Research**

My future research agenda includes spinning off my dissertation work and data into papers on bureaucracy and authoritarianism as well as expanding my work on regional organizations and small state diplomatic approaches. With regards to spinning off work from my dissertation, I intend to further explore democratic decay in western democracies facing rising nationalism and strongmen as well as exploring bureaucracy's role in regime survival in authoritarian regimes.

I also plan to investigate how regional organizations are adapting to rising nationalist sentiments around the worlds by reframing the idea of integration. In this case, I hypothesize that regional organizations that can offer technical expertise and/or specialized initiatives on issues like environment, education or skill development for their members will survive and thrive in the long run.

My future research agenda will utilize newer methodological tools like social network analysis and machine learned text analysis in addition to traditional tools like regression analysis and descriptive studies.