

# 1. Scholarship

## 1A. Self-assessment

The primary focus of my scholarly activities is extremism – understanding what it is and what influences it among the public, elites, and other parts of democratic society. My focus is on democracies because extremism poses an especially complex challenge there as political actors, institutions, and citizens juggle some of the norms that underlie democracy (such as equal access to participation, political tolerance, and expectations of civility) with the very real need to respond to and restrain extremism. This research focus became crystalized for me as I was applying for jobs after graduate school while completing my Ph.D. and has been more developed and refined since. This is reflected in my newer projects, working papers, and data collections that focus more directly on extremism as a larger concept.

I came to BYU after working for two years as an assistant professor at Clemson University, which was my first position after graduate school. I came with several existing publications, and I have worked hard to continue (or increase) my research productivity since that point. As the resources available to me to conduct research at BYU are far greater than at Clemson, I have spent the last year expanding my research projects and research teams to be as productive as possible and make the best use of the tools available to me here. I believe this is reflected in several of my research projects, new collaborations with faculty at BYU, and my expanded work with research assistants (which was far more limited at Clemson).

One area of my research focuses on different responses to extremism. One example of this is a solo-authored book published with Cambridge University Press based on my dissertation – this is the book entitled **Should You Stay Away From Strangers? Experiments On The Political Consequences Of Intergroup Contact**. This book was officially published in 2021 and represents a significant amount of work to expand the work in my dissertation, respond to critical reviews, and navigate the publication process. Using a series of experiment in the lab, field, and online, the book explores the political consequences of intergroup contact and how attempts to create equal status contact can reinforce group divisions and lead to a backlash against traditionally marginalized groups. This volume touches on my larger research agenda by exploring the possibilities and pitfalls of one popular way to address various forms of extremism – intergroup contact – while also discussing a number of methodological issues involved in conducting experiments on this topic.

Another research project in this area of my scholarship was also recently reviewed and accepted for publication by Cambridge University Press in book form. This research is quite different from my book on contact, is co-authored with several colleagues from graduate school, and considers partisan extremism. More specifically, we measure the stereotypes Americans hold about ordinary partisans, the consequences of those stereotypes on different kinds of extremism, and the larger lessons from those stereotypes for key political science concepts like polarization and partisanship. Through experiments, machine-learning text analysis, and other techniques, we find that people hold stereotypes of different kinds and that stereotypes focusing on the traits or personal characteristics of partisans are most linked to polarization. We suggest that one way to

address partisan extremism in the United States, then, is not to convince people there are no differences between the parties but rather to emphasize specific ways that partisans differ. This book is an expansion of one of my published articles in *Political Behavior* and includes several novel data collections and a deeper theoretical and conceptual discussion than the corresponding article. It has been gratifying to see this project develop from the original idea to the published article and more expansive book. It is, at present, the area of my research that has been most cited and for which I have been most frequently contacted. In fact, it has recently led to one new collaboration and some ongoing discussions with researchers at the Civic Health Project (<https://www.civichealthproject.org/>).

Another set of studies I am conducting looks at how elected officials can encourage or discourage extremism. One of these projects, co-authored with Andrew Thompson at George Washington University and about racial messaging in the United States, recently received a 'Conditional acceptance' decision at *Political Behavior*. We use a pair of survey experiments (one fielded before and one after the racial unrest following the killing of George Floyd) that evaluate how elected officials can use different kinds of justifications to neutralize criticisms that their policies and proposals are racist. In a bigger sense, this paper discusses how elites can cloak and encourage support for extremism through various tactics (even after being called out as extremist) and contributes to my larger agenda in that way. We have spent a significant time workshopping and revising this paper, and we are excited to have it accepted and soon to be published.

A different stream of my research on extremism focuses directly on what extremism is, how members of the public think about extremism, and the consequences of those perceptions on electoral support and political tolerance. One of my solo-authored papers takes this topic on directly, using a conjoint experiment with a sample of the American public and elected officials to determine what kinds of attitudes and behaviors respondents most closely associate with extremism. In this project, I find that while there are electoral penalties for extremism and respondents do react to extremism how existing research would suggest, majorities of respondents do not consider someone to be extreme until that person displays multiple types of extremism at once and are far less likely to label someone as extreme if they are ideologically similar to that person. In the last year or so, I have submitted this paper to several journals and workshopped it in various settings, and this has provided helpful feedback about how to improve and focus the paper. This process has generally helped me to focus my writing – that is, focus on a small set of key contributions in a paper – and clearly articulate the larger importance of my research. This manuscript is currently under review, and I am optimistic about its trajectory.

As a follow-up to this study, in 2021 I submitted an application to an early-career scholar competition at Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS). TESS is an NSF funded platform for obtaining funding for experiments conducted with high-quality, nationally representative samples (hosted by NORC at the University of Chicago). It is highly competitive, and over 130 proposals were submitted for this competition. My project was one of five proposals accepted by TESS, and I used this funding for another conjoint experiment (N=4,000) that emphasized the role of social information (the judgments of others) on perceptions of

extremism and how these perceptions influence political tolerance. The data collection on this project is complete, and I anticipate that the results of this experiment will be incredibly helpful in confirming the results of the earlier manuscript and extending its conclusions in a number of theoretical and empirical ways.

A separate paper in this area of my research considers citizens' and public officials' definitions of extremism as a way to consider how people in the United States think about this concept. This paper uses three surveys (one from 2019 and two from 2020) and open-ended data to evaluate the ideas people have about extremism and how those ideas diverge or correspond to topics academics discuss when defining extremism. I use various methods of text analysis in this project, including sentiment analysis, dictionary-based coding, and structural topic modelling. This paper has been submitted to several journals and presented at one conference (MPSA in 2021), and while I have not yet been successful at publishing this piece, this feedback has helped me to think carefully about the contribution of this project, the specific methods used in the paper, and how to position this project relative to my other work. I have pared down the paper significantly as a result of this feedback to present a more focused and narrowly-targeted set of conclusions.

The feedback that I have received on these projects on the nature of extremism has also encouraged me to think about a larger book project connecting these papers (and other data I have not yet put into a manuscript) to give this topic the theoretical and methodological attention that it needs. I am still early in the process of considering this possibility, but I think there is a lot of potential for a book on this topic – what extremism is and how people think about it – and that I have important things to contribute to the research in this area.

My work on extremism also includes a consideration of more specific manifestations of extremism, most notably populism. In the broader context of my scholarship, I think of this area of work as (1) a consideration of an important kind of extremism and (2) a place to test out ideas about extremism that can then be applied more broadly beyond populism. In this area, I currently submitted one co-authored paper for review in the last year; this project leverages a large-scale experiment conducted through *The Guardian* (N=30,000) to test different theories about populism and provide a clearer picture about the causes of populism. We use open-ended, framing treatments that encourage respondents to place blame for political problems in a populist or nonpopulist way, and we evaluate the effectiveness of these frames on different kinds of political concerns and across respondents' ideological views. The sheer size of this sample allows us to take up theoretical concerns we would not otherwise be able to address. Further, this project employs cutting-edge methodological tools – like supervised, machine-learning coding of text responses – to support our theoretical arguments. I am optimistic about the chances of this paper for publication, and I see it as building on my prior work on populism.

In the last year, I have also conducted an additional experiment on populism involving four countries (the U.S., Mexico, Ecuador, and Brazil). The focus of this project is to expand our understanding of populism (and other kinds of extremism) in two key ways: (1) how blame attribution for both policy failures and successes leads to support for populist ideas and (2) how populist frames of thinking influences broader attitudes towards democracy. This co-authored



project is still in the early stages of analysis, and I expect it will be ready for review towards the end of the upcoming academic year.

A final area of my work on extremism focuses on methodological tools that help explore what extremism is and what interventions can encourage or discourage extremism. In this area of focus, I have participated in a larger collaboration at BYU with two faculty members in our department and two faculty members in the department of computer science that has been incredibly productive in developing artificial intelligences tools to understand individuals' attitudes and behavior. Our goal in this project is to develop ways to use state-of-the-art AI language models (LMs) as a way to understand complex human ideas. In a paper currently under review that has been presented at two conferences, we propose, and find evidence for the idea, that LMs can be studied as effective proxies for specific human sub-populations despite overall biases in these models. This collaboration has forced me to develop skills that I would not otherwise have and has opened up areas of research for me that I was not able to explore previously. This group effort has also involved several grant applications to the National Science Foundation. While we have not been awarded a grant thus far, the feedback has been strongly positive and several program officers have directed us to other funding applications at the NSF that would fit our work. There are a number of ways in which this area of my research connects to extremism, even if the larger focus is on applications of state-of-the-art artificial intelligence to the social sciences. Specifically, this project is developing ways of coding complex topics rapidly (like extremism) and exploring ways to shift attitudes and reduce prejudice (including in areas that many usually think of as extreme).

While working on these projects at BYU, I have also had the opportunity to work much more closely with undergraduate students than I have previously. At present, I am working with five excellent undergraduate RAs on different projects. I also participated in the FHSS Student Research Academy – which provides research and mentoring opportunities for students from traditionally underrepresented groups - working with two other undergraduate students in the college. I have found these relationships to be productive and rewarding (as I hope they are for the students as well!).

At present, I have one co-authored paper as a conditional acceptance, one solo-authored project under review, two co-authored papers under review, two solo-authored papers that are advanced but currently under development (which I expect to submit in the next semester), two co-authored papers under development (which I expect to submit in the next semester), one solo-authored project where the data collection just finished, and three co-authored papers where data collection is either ongoing or recently completed. In addition, I have three other projects in the very early stages. I am fairly pleased by the spread of these projects (i.e., having work at various places in the research process), but I need to focus my energies more and restrain myself from taking on new projects given what I already have going on. I have found this load to be more manageable because of good teams of RAs and good faculty collaborators, but it can be challenging to balance all at once.

## 1B. Goals

In keeping with my assessment in the previous section, one of my goals is to focus and direct my research more and contain the spread of my projects. I think this will involve wrapping up some projects that are near completion, allowing others on research teams take a larger role, and declining interesting but more tangential projects. I've struggled to do this thus far out of a desire to produce more and publish more (and expand my academic network), but I think I need to do this kind of academic pruning to create a sustainable pace. In the short term, this will involve fewer new data collections and more analysis and completion of existing projects (I have, for example, three projects where data collection has finished but where I have not had time to even begin to look at the results).

One of my perennial goals is to always have at least three projects under review. I have been able to do that thus far, but I will continue to have this as a goal as my projects proceed through the research process. Ideally, I would have at least one journal article accepted for publication each year, but that is at least somewhat of a stochastic process over which I have only limited control. I've therefore shifted in recent years to focusing on submissions rather than acceptances.

I would like to learn how to work with my undergraduate RAs more effectively. So far, they have been extremely helpful on several of my projects, but I am in the middle of developing a more systematic onboarding process (a set of materials they read and process to get started regardless of what project they are working on). I am also thinking about how to make meetings with RAs more effective and if there is a way to pursue more of a lab model (like economics or psychology). By lab model, I mean finding ways to get RAs from different projects to meet with me for a more reduced number of meetings. Besides reducing the number of RA meetings I have in a week, this has a more important benefit of having students work together and learn from each other rather than working in a more isolated fashion. I would also like to link more systematically the RAs I am working with into other opportunities for students in our department, college, and across BYU – such as the research lab at CSED and Global Politics Lab. I am committed to mentoring and working with students in whatever ways that help them – I think that part of this could be through more interactions and collaboration with each other (which is currently somewhat lacking in how I am working with my RAs). In this goal, I am keeping my central focus on the experiences and learning of my undergraduate RAs, which is in line with BYU's larger focus on student-centric research.

I would also like to apply for and receive additional funding from the college (in the form of MEG grants) to pay for some of my student RAs; I have several projects in mind for these applications and will be attentive to deadlines and requirements as the funding comes closer.

## 2. Teaching

### 2A. Self-assessment

My general teaching philosophy is composed of two parts: encouraging grounded learning and student autonomy. My time with students is limited, and my goal is therefore to support and encourage students to develop the skills to learn on their own and to see the immediate value of the things that they are studying in my classes. These objectives guide my teaching and

interactions with my students, regardless of the specific courses that I am teaching in a given semester.

I have enjoyed my first year of teaching at BYU, where I taught two sections of POLI 210 (Principles of American Politics) and one special topics class on extremism in the United States. Both were new classes for me, although POLI 210 was a modification of an introductory class I taught at Clemson University in the Fall of 2019. The course on political extremism was one that I have wanted to develop for some time, and I am happy that I was able to create, teach, and submit it to be a standing class with its own course number.

In general, I had very positive experiences teaching these classes and teaching at BYU for the first time. My discussions with students and my student reviews indicate that my students feel I am an engaged, thoroughly prepared, and supportive instructor and that I am committed to helping them learn. This aligns with my teaching philosophy and my values as an instructor (as well as BYU's goals and expectations with regards to teaching). I required my students in my 210 class to meet with me during office hours as a part of the class, and I found that this helped me to get to know them and to understand better my students at BYU (an important experience given my transition from another university).

One area of improvement that has emerged from my teaching over the last year is that I need to expect more from my students and make my courses more rigorous. Some of this is related to transitioning to a new university with a different student body. Further, I have generally found that the rigor of the courses in my department at BYU is higher than at my previous institutions. I have also chosen to be more flexible than usual and err on the side of a lighter load given the social and health environment of COVID-19. I do think, however, that I should expect more of my students in terms of course materials (what they should do to prepare for class, for example) and in the depth of course assignments (the amount of writing they are required to do, my standards for evaluating writing, etc.). This increase in expectations is definitely consistent with my larger teaching approach, and I am confident I will be able to strike the right balance as I continue to work with undergraduates at BYU.

## 2B. Goals

In line with my self-assessment, one of my major goals is to increase my expectations of my students and the rigor of my classes. I'm exploring two ways of doing this – asking students to complete more written assignments throughout the semester and holding students to a higher standard in evaluating these assessments. Given the class I will be teaching this upcoming year (POLI 328), I do not anticipate any trouble in doing this. I have already designed this course with this goal in mind, and I plan to get feedback from others and my team of TAs for this class to make sure I am on track to complete this goal.

One of my other goals is to teach and assess my performance in POLI 328 (Statistical Analysis), which is a new course for me. This is one of the most rigorous classes in the department and requires students to master a qualitatively different topic for a political science class (statistical analysis and thinking), the skill of using statistical software (Stata in this case), and a large range of methods (including basic probability, comparisons of means, experiments, regression, binary



maximum likelihood models, and panel data). As an instructor, there are several components of the class that make it a challenging course to teach. The first of these is simply the breadth of coverage for the class and helping students throughout learn this range of material. In addition, many students take this course with some degree of anxiety about the topic. The fact that the class is a major requirement also means that there is not self-selection into the class as there is for other upper-division classes. Teaching this course also requires a significant effort to manage the team of about eight teaching assistants as these TAs hold weekly review sessions, carry out most of the grading, interface with students frequently, etc. I think that these challenges can be overcome, and I am intentionally planning my teaching to address these hurdles. For example, I am using a flipped classroom approach to allow students to ask more questions in class and have multiple exposure to the same material. I also emphasize in several different ways that students can succeed in the class regardless of the math ability they have before they enter the course. I am also currently working with my TAs to get them ready to help the class successfully.

Presently, I have already designed the assessments, exams, and syllabus for this class. As I teach this class for the first time, I plan to solicit student feedback at a number of points (including midcourse evaluation, anonymous feedback on specific lectures and assignments, etc.) and keep in close touch with my TA team about how the class is going. Based on these experiences, I will evaluate what, if anything, I would like to change to improve the course when I teach it in the Winter 2022 semester.

Outside of the courses I am teaching, I have two additional goals. The first is to make use of my peers in the department to conduct some peer evaluations of my teaching. I have not yet been able to do this, and I think it is especially important as I am teaching the same class in the Fall and in the Winter. I plan on working with the curriculum/teaching committee in the department to do this. My second goal is to make better use of the CTL resources, including attending one or two of their workshops per semester. I did some of this over the last year (one or two workshops in Fall 2020, for example), but I would like to do more of this over the coming year to force myself to think directly about my teaching and better use the resources at BYU to improve myself as an instructor.

### 3. Citizenship

#### 3A. Self-assessment

In my first year, I have had various opportunities to contribute to the larger BYU community through my citizenship responsibilities and other mentoring experiences. Initially, I was assigned as a member at large on two committees in the department – the curriculum committee and research and academic life committee. For the latter, I participated fully in the hiring process, including attending meetings, reading candidate applications, providing feedback to the committee chair, etc. I found this to be a gratifying and positive experience. I am looking forward to working on this committee again in the coming year.

For the curriculum committee, I reviewed some curriculum-related documents and provided some initial feedback. However, I was quickly reassigned to be the department honors program

coordinator and removed from the curriculum committee. As such, I did not do a great deal for the curriculum committee.

I have enjoyed working as the honors coordinator for the department. Generally speaking, I did not find the workload from the assignment to be too heavy – I typically meet with one or two students a month for this committee and field perhaps 5-10 emails during that same period. I have held several orientation meetings (by Zoom) for incoming honors students in our department, helped three students who are working on their thesis proposals, and one student finalize and present her thesis defense. I have enjoyed the opportunity to learn about students' research interests and help them navigate the honors program.

Outside of my formal citizenship assignments, I have sought out other ways to be a supportive colleague and good citizen in the department and university. I am an active participant in the CSED research lab, where I presented two different papers over the last academic year. I also thoroughly read others' research and provide them with detailed comments before and during the research meetings. Through CSED, I also mentored a student group working on a conjoint experiment about whistleblowers. This group did excellent work and had great research ideas (they won an award at the college's poster conference) – mentoring them was rewarding and easy to do. I have also been an active participant in the department's regular research presentations (called Thursday group meetings), serving as a discussant once and providing feedback in and out of the group meetings to those sharing their work with us.

I also participated in the college's Student Research Academy program, which is designed to connect faculty members and students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. This has two goals – to provide students with research experience and to create mentoring interactions between these undergraduates and faculty members. I worked with two students from this program, where they provided research assistance on one of my ongoing projects and I had mentoring meetings with them about their post-BYU plans. I am fully supportive of this program at the college level and provided them with detailed feedback about what my experience with these students was like. In the coming year, I am participating in this program again and have been assigned one student to work with. I look forward to participating in this initiative again.

Outside of BYU, I have also contributed to the larger discipline in a number of ways. I have completed 16 reviews for peer-reviewed academic journals. I wrote one invited book review, which was published in the journal *Congress & the Presidency*, and one review for a funding organization (TESS). I served as a discussant and panel chair at the 2021 MPSA conference (which was held online). I have also begun working as an editor for a handbook on political psychology with Chris Karpowitz in our department and Cara Wong at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

### 3B. Goals

One of my first citizenship goals is to continue doing all of the things that I did in my first year, both in terms of serving in my department assignments and contributing to the department and field in other ways. I am continuing to serve on the research and academic life committee and as the honors coordinator. I will also continue to engage in CSED meetings, mentoring CSED



students, activity participating in our department's research presentations (what we call Thursday group meetings), and the FHSS research academy program.

With respect to the college's research academy, one of my goals this coming year is to connect my assigned student to other opportunities on campus for undergraduates. This would include programs like the CSED and Global Politics Labs; various poster sessions at the department, college, and university; funding to attend academic conferences; and other opportunities of this kind. As stated earlier in this plan, I will also do the same kinds of connecting for the other students I work with (as RAs, TAs, etc.).

One of the things I would like to think more concretely about in the coming year is my mentoring style. I have not intentionally developed a specific approach to working with students in this way, and I suspect it would be a more productive experience for them if I did so. Different things I might work into a mentoring style might be the degree to which I focus on intentionally teaching mentees, how best to provide a sounding board for students' ideas, and when to act mostly as a listener for students' concerns, needs, and questions. There is no one style that is perfect for every mentor and mentee, and I expect to spend some time working through this and experimenting with different approaches. To help with this, there are various resources online on how to do this (see [this](#) from the University of Oregon and [this](#) from the American Psychological Association); I simply need to devote time and energy into thinking about this.

Along those lines, I would also like to more intentionally look among my students for those who may need mentoring (but may not be inclined to ask for it). I think I do a great job supporting students who ask for help, but there are likely many students who I am not noticing and therefore not supporting. There are a number of students that I think I could positively help, encourage, and provide opportunities for, but I need to do more to identify and reach out to these students.