Research Statement
William O'Brochta

Right after students in my introductory courses learn how to and have the opportunity to register to vote, they inevitably have questions about whether voting means that their views are represented and why the first time they were invited to register to vote was already after most of them were eligible to do so. I use my research to teach students to be engaged citizens. This includes teaching disciplinary skills using political science literature as a guide, inviting students to collaborate with one another and me to investigate these issues, and applying our collective expertise to make progress toward solving public policy problems.

My research makes three major contributions: (1) systematically exploring how elite ethnic representation impacts ethnic relations, (2) showing how misaligned incentives cause ethnic representation to fail and ethnic violence to become an attractive alternative, and (3) carefully considering the importance of sound and varied methodologies to study representation, identity, and violence. Within each contribution I emphasize not only my research approach, but also how my work contributes to developing students as engaged citizens with disciplinary skills working in a collaborative environment to improve public policy outcomes.

Representation and Identity

Political representation has the potential to provide presence, voice, and resources to traditionally excluded groups. Countless international organizations advocate for increasing ethnic minority representation to improve ethnic relations and to these groups with resources. I assess the effectiveness of this strategy by investigating the consequences of ethnic representation on attitudes and behaviors of both the public and political elites. My work finds that increasing representation of traditionally underrepresented ethnic groups is not a particularly effective way to improve ethnic relations or to deliver benefits to these groups.

I begin by collecting new data on ethnic diversity in cabinets worldwide and use it to show that country leaders' primary motivation for increasing ethnic political representation is their expectation that ethnic groups gaining representation will lend them political support (published in *Politics, Groups, and Identities*). This means that ethnic representation only occurs in select, politically advantageous circumstances. Unfortunately, I also find that ethnic cabinet representation has relatively little effect on ethnic tolerance among members of the public (published in *Political Studies*). This could be because there is substantial heterogeneity in what representation means to people and their willingness to advocate for increased representation for their ethnic group (published in *Nations and Nationalism*).

However, increasing ethnic representation could still be worthwhile if it prompts political elites from different ethnic groups to develop favorable interethnic relationships. Experimental work I conducted in India suggests that increasing elite ethnic diversity does not impact elite outgroup views and that intra-elite interethnic contact has some very limited positive effects (R&R at *Political Behavior*). My current work starts with this result among local elected officials called municipal corporators in Indian urban governments and examines how elite ethnic diversity impacts the relationships that elites form with one another. I argue that elites have incentives to collaborate across ethnic lines because they can more effectively deliver benefits to their constituents by working together. Municipal corporators can raise public policy issues to local bureaucrats by asking questions during corporation meetings. I

leverage a new dataset on question-asking behavior to identify corporators who team up to ask questions together. This unique measure allows for an examination of the ways in which ethnic diversity and interethnic contact impact elite behavior, not just attitudes.

I am extending these research results in two main ways. In one project (published in *Governance*). I examine the welfare of traditionally excluded ethnic groups as it is reflected in public requests for government services. Second, I have thus far studied ethnic representation and its effect on outgroup views and welfare in relative isolation, without considering the role that other identities play in shaping this relationship. Now that I have established theories and measures of ethnic representation, I consider how ethnicity may interact with other identity-based factors including language and gender (three papers under review).

Students and I apply these research results as a part of community engaged projects. For example, my *Representation, Identity, and Community* course is wholly based on students reading comparative politics literature on these issues and applying it to a local political problem, going so far as to develop and begin to implement a plan to address representational inequities in the local community. Students in the most recent iteration of this course wrote a plan to increase civic and community engagement on campus, and that plan is serving as a guideline for my leadership of an effort to start a university-wide initiative on civic and community engagement.

Violence

Ethnic representation often fails to help ethnically diverse polities achieve long-term stability, sometimes resulting in ethnic violence. Both elites and the public hold responsibilities for ethnic violence; in particular, I investigate how perceived personal benefits result in elites and the public promoting or engaging in ethnic violence.

Elites make decisions to engage in or to avoid violent conflict in order to achieve potential personal or political gain. In some cases, the prospect of maximizing the financial benefits of political power is enough to prompt leaders to engage in ethnic conflict. I find in a meta-analysis of natural resources and conflict that natural resource wealth is not associated with increased conflict propensity, but that ethnic diversity is an important moderator variable (published in *Research & Politics*).

More often, elite personal financial gain mixes with re-election prospects to make the threat of inciting ethnic violence a powerful political negotiation tool. Here, leaders of underrepresented ethnic groups have the ability to make credible threats if their co-ethnic citizens are geographically concentrated in resource rich regions. These leaders bargain for extra political power in exchange for committing not to incite ethnic violence (published in *Caucasus Survey*). Sudden influxes of wealth can function in the same way: leaders in regions with unexpected increases in tourism spending can extract greater financial concessions from the central government (published in *Tourism Economics*).

Rhetoric is an important tool that elites use to prompt the public to support their decisions; indeed, elites do not always respond to crises in other, more meaningful ways (published in *British Politics*) particularly policy responses (published in *Journal of Experimental Political Science*). Elite rhetoric alone is not sufficient for radicalizing people, but rhetoric may be effective if it occurs in conjunction with instrumental incentives like socio-economic deprivation (published in *British Journal of Political Science*). Elites also use rhetoric to generate favor from the international community (published in *Political Research Quarterly*).

I use these research results to teach students disciplinary skills through data driven activities and policy simulations. Students studying violence often want to go beyond rhetoric and to better understand the data construction process. I have developed a series of in-class activities where I walk students through parts of my natural resources and conflict meta-analysis. These activities illustrate how examining many research studies on a single topic provides a much more nuanced picture of the results than does a single study that elites may use as evidence to support policy positions. With these activities in mind, I ask students to work together in legislative policymaking simulations to see how well-crafted policy proposals change as a result of elite motivations and rhetoric.

Measurement

Conceptualizing and measuring both political representation and violence involves institutional, media, and public opinion data. Past work has relied heavily on media sources whose reporting on violence is often quite similar (published in *Asian Journal of Communication*) and potentially biased. Social media posters also exhibit biases that make it difficult to precisely estimate the size of ethnic collective action without on-the-ground evidence (published in *Studies in Indian Politics*). Public opinion surveys may be a way to avoid these biases, but researchers must take steps to ensure data quality when using survey platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk (published in *Research & Politics*).

Students are particularly interested in research questions related to media data, representation, and violence. I work to increase student media literacy using activities that reveal media bias. Additionally, media data is an excellent entry point for students interested in collaborating with me to conduct research. My *Comparative Foreign Governments* course presents students with an original dataset on newspaper articles written during the 2020 Citizenship Amendment Act protests in India. Students use this dataset as a jumping off point for identifying research questions and working with datasets. These fundamental data skills prepare students for my *Scope and Methods in the Social Sciences* course which itself teaches students research and analysis skills so that they are prepared to work collaboratively with me on a research article. Such a collaboration occurs in my *Politics of Developing Nations* course where I re-introduce this dataset and we spend the course working in a research lab-like setting to produce publishable research.

This is just one example of using my research expertise to mentor students. While some of my students are interested in careers in which extensive research article writing and analysis experience is helpful, many of my students are destined for careers in law, government, or non-profit organizations. As such, my *Politics of Developing Nations* course has options for teams of students to study the legal or public policy implications of the research work that other student teams are conducting. That course fits in with my interest in helping students develop experiences and skills that are most helpful for their future careers, even if those experiences deviate slightly from the traditional model of political science research.

My research addresses fundamental questions spanning comparative politics, international relations, and American public policy. I contribute to existing work by linking public and elite behaviors and attitudes concerning both representation and the potential for violence. I am already engaging students in my work, and I look forward to expanding opportunities for student collaboration in the future.