

**QUINN M. BORNSTEIN: *The Political Framing of the National School Lunch Program: A Study of Bills Introduced in the 109<sup>th</sup> - 115<sup>th</sup> Congresses***

Over half of school-aged children in the United States participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). However, the NSLP has never been primarily concerned with children's health. Its story instead is one of competing political frames; particularly welfare versus agricultural interests. The thesis is guided by two research questions: What is the dominant frame in NSLP legislation today? How does this frame vary depending on characteristics of the bills' sponsors? By answering these questions, I seek to understand the role of these two historically competing frames in the 109th through the start of the 115th Congresses, uncover whether there is a different prominent frame in current NSLP legislation, and reveal who in Congress advocates for certain NSLP policies and why they do so. In order to answer these research questions, I created a dataset of 394 NSLP bills, characteristics of the bills' sponsors, and campaign contributions they received from relevant interest groups. I found that nutrition is by far the dominant frame, followed by agriculture, then access (welfare). Junior legislators, Democrats, and House members introduced the most NSLP bills. However, most of the sponsor characteristics have minimal effect on framing. My thesis demonstrates that framing is an important tool for establishing broad policy themes, but not useful for explaining or predicting the complexities of NSLP bill sponsorship.

*Advisor: Professor Ross Cheit, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: Lecturer Dawn King, Institute at Brown for Environment and Society*

**VICTOR BRECHENMACHER: *Western European Burqa Bans in International Comparison: A Comparative Study of France, Germany, and the Netherlands***

A growing number of states in Western Europe and elsewhere impose legal restrictions – so-called 'burqa bans' – on the wearing of face-covering dress in public or in state institutions. Widely interpreted as targeting specific types of Islamic dress, these bans represent a significant restriction of religious free exercise rights, but little is known about the political and legal forces driving them and shaping their design or scope. On the one hand, an extensive academic literature explains state's regulation of religious diversity by pointing to nationally specific, historically anchored models of citizenship or state-church relations. On the other hand, commentary on the bans often portrays them as a symbolic attempt by governments to protect themselves against electoral competition by populist, far-right parties. This study evaluates these two common assumptions through a qualitative comparison of 'burqa bans' in three Western European states: France, Germany, and the Netherlands. It argues that the presence and design of burqa bans are not explained by national models of citizenship or state-church relations, but rather by national party politics. However, the role of the populist far-right in these political debates is not the same across countries: Bans can be driven by the desire to ward off an anti-Islam, far-right party, but they have also been introduced in cases where the far-right actively opposed state regulation of religious expression.

*Advisor: Professor J. Nicholas Ziegler, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: Professor Robert Blair, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

**EZRA B. DULIT-GREENBERG: *Between the Lines: Explaining State Differences in 2011 Democratic Party Gerrymandering***

Partisan redistricting, or partisan gerrymandering, is a process by which mapmakers ensure a particular electoral result by manipulating the voting district maps produced by each state every ten years. As the issue

comes more and more into the public consciousness, understanding the causes of gerrymandering will be crucial. Existing literature points to some potential causes—unified partisan control, urbanization, racial demographics—but does not explain divergences in levels of gerrymandering in several Democratic states in 2011. This study compares the 2011 redistricting processes of similar Democratic states, seeking to uncover structural factors that might explain those divergences. Vermont and West Virginia serve as one set of case studies; Massachusetts and Connecticut as another. The study concludes that some reforms may be effective in preventing partisan gerrymandering, these being: creating bipartisan redistricting commissions with real mapmaking power, curbing incumbency gerrymanders, and enforcing firm limits on population deviation and minority population in majority-minority districts.

*Advisor: Professor of Practice Richard Arenberg, Political Science*  
*Reader: Professor Jordan Branch, Political Science*

**JACOB A. FREUND: *Governance Structures and Public Education: Policy Responsiveness in Urban School Districts***

Elected school boards have governed the nation's public schools for over two hundred years. They are composed of, operated by and tasked with serving American citizens – pinnacles of democratic governance and microcosms of the US political system writ large. However, elected school boards are in danger. Recently, a new governance structure has taken control of America's largest urban school districts: mayoral control. Mayoral control centralizes education power with the city mayor and an appointed deliberative body. No research has been conducted analyzing the effects of these different governance structures on different dimensions of democratic governance. This thesis asks: Does the type of education governance structure influence policy responsiveness to constituent preferences? This thesis conducts a cross-case analysis of two cities with different governance structures: New York City's mayoral control system and Rochester City's elected school board system. It applies process tracing to policy debates in three key policy areas: 1) Charter Schools and Educational Partnerships, 2) School Closings and Consolidations, and 3) Academic and Social Outcomes. Utilizing interviews with public officials and private citizens, archival school district materials, and local news sources, this thesis observes the role of responsiveness in the decision-making processes of both governance structures. Its findings indicate that Rochester City's elected school board is markedly more responsive to constituent preferences than New York City's mayor-appointed panel.

*Advisor: Professor Kenneth Wong, Education, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs and Political Science*  
*Reader: Senior Lecturer Luther Spoehr, Education*

**JOEY GUTFLEISH: *Solitary Confinement: Understanding State Variation in the Modern American Prison System***

In theory, solitary confinement in the United States isolates “worst of the worst” inmates from general prison populations in order to maintain prison safety. In 2016, the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) and the Arthur Liman Public Interest Program at Yale Law School published the only current, comprehensive data on its usage, which revealed significant variations among the states. This thesis uses regression analysis and three complementary case studies to test three hypotheses centered around administrative, political, and race-based conditions to understand differences in outcomes. We specifically looked at prison capacity ratings (administrative influence), governor ideology and Republican vote shares in the 2012 Presidential Election (political influence), and non-White inmate populations (racial influence). We found that that political and administrative conditions appeared to best correlate with solitary

confinement use across jurisdictions. Specifically, Republican states seem to house higher percentages of their inmates in isolation and as jurisdictions near full capacity, their percent of isolated inmates seems to decrease. In short, this thesis suggests that solitary confinement rates may tell us more about a state's political make-up and prison capacity than a reflection of prisoner behavior.

*Advisor: Professor David Skarbek, Political Science*

*Reader: Professor Paul Testa, Political Science*

**GIANNA JASINSKI: *Equal Pay is Not Yet Equal: Does Federalism Perpetuate Gender Wage Inequality?***

The gender wage gap continues to be a real and persistent problem for women in the US. Nearly 60 years after the Equal Pay Act was signed into law, which was designed to abolish wage disparity, women only earn 82% of what men earn. As a result of the lack of comprehensive federal legislation, states are in charge of eliminating the wage gap. However, states vary in their responsiveness to this issue. Additionally, economists have found that 40% of the wage gap is unexplainable. This leaves plenty of room for discrimination to play a role. My thesis will explore the question of whether variation in state laws drives the variation in the wage gap across states. I found that increasing the strength of a state's pay equity protections decreases the wage gap. The variation in state laws creates disparities in the protection of a woman's economic security. Federalism perpetuates gender wage inequality.

*Advisor: Professor Wendy Schiller, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: Professor Paul Testa, Political Science*

**ANDREW H. KUTSCHER: *A Roof For All: Engaging the Private Sector to Provide Affordable Housing in New York City***

York City is faced with a critical shortage of affordable housing. Although current mayor, Bill de Blasio, was elected on a progressive platform of helping the poor, he has relied on market-based approaches to providing affordable housing, similar to his more conservative predecessors. This thesis seeks to understand why New York City provides affordable housing through market-based approaches in partnerships with private developers, rather than invoking greater regulation or increased levels of direct subsidization. Using city data, primary and secondary research, and interviews of key actors, this thesis finds that three mechanisms converge to limit the policy available to New York City for providing housing. The thesis concludes that economic constraints resulting from a restricted local budget and debt capacity, limited amounts of federal and state funding, and poorer people's lack of political leverage and cohesion relative to that of developers makes market-based approaches to housing more politically attractive and feasible than other alternatives.

*Advisor: Professor Margaret Weir, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: Professor Marion Orr, Political Science and Urban Studies*

**MACLAINE E. LEHAN: *Red States' Medicaid Expansion Decisions Under the Affordable Care Act: Exploring the Political Influence of the Koch Network***

In 2012, the Supreme Court ruled that the Medicaid expansion provision of President Obama's Affordable Care Act was unconstitutionally coercive thus making it voluntary. To date, the majority of blue states have

expanded Medicaid while 18 red states have abstained. Why did some red states opt into Medicaid expansion while others did not? My central claim is that governors' decisions in red states were heavily influenced by pressure from the Koch Network; a political network marked by a strong commitment to conservatism and libertarian principles. Case studies of expansion decisions in Texas, Arizona and Ohio, demonstrate that governors in red states opted into or out of Medicaid expansion based on the strength of the Koch network in relation to the state's politicians and officeholders. This evaluation of Medicaid expansion in red states reflects the influence of organized networks in conservative politics and more broadly the power of external interests in the American political system.

*Advisor: Professor Eric Patashnik, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: Professor Ross Cheit, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

**JEANINE MOJUM: *Believing Belief: A Neutral Evaluation of Sincerity for Constitutional Claims of Conscience***

The Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause have existed paradoxically because the jurisprudence holds that the Free Exercise demands the state to give religious exemptions to laws while the latter precludes the state from endorsing religiousness. Scholars have created alternative frameworks which demand that individuals with secular moral claims of conscience be given exemptions to better uphold equality. However, these scholars accept a biased evaluation of sincerity that precedes their frameworks, which constrains their ability to substantively mitigate the subordination of individuals with secular moral beliefs. This thesis presents a neutral evaluation of sincerity which requires that: 1) the individual's explanation of that belief be sufficient for articulating their belief; 2) the constraints imposed on the state—which prevent it from assessing the plausibility or centrality of religious beliefs—be extended to include secular beliefs and; 3) the presumption of sincerity given to religious and nonreligious claims be equal.

*Advisor: Professor Corey Brettschneider, Political Science*

*Reader: PhD Candidate Sean Monahan, Political Science*

**BASUNDHARA MUKHERJEE: *The Aftershocks of Hindutva: The Politics of Hindu Nationalism in Post-Earthquake Kachchh, Gujarat***

In 2001, a devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck the Kachchh district in the Indian state of Gujarat, resulting in a death toll of nearly 14,000. This thesis considers the puzzle of two phenomena that arose in the aftermath of the earthquake: first, the robust role of Hindu nationalist organizations in relief and long-term reconstruction of Kachchh and, second, the subsequent loss of the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, in the district, where it had held the majority. Through process tracing, I find that, in light of an impending critical election and the rise of the Hindu right in the BJP, the Hindu nationalist movement merged development of post-earthquake Kachchh with a political agenda at the grassroots. I examine how this strategy, termed "proximate engagement," sought to re-establish Hindu nationalism onto Kachchh and gain electoral support for the BJP. I further contend that proximate engagement failed to mobilize support for the party in the 2002 elections and, instead, alienated voters along three dimensions of identity: religion, caste, and a subnational Kachchhi identity. This research contributes to theoretical understandings of the Hindu nationalist movement in India as well as politically-motivated interventions in post-disaster societies, particularly as climate change engenders greater disaster vulnerability across the globe.

*Advisor: Professor Ashutosh Varshney, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: PhD Candidate Shishav Parajuli, Political Science*

**LUCY H. PRICE: *From Failure to Success to Failure: An Analysis of US Engagement in Iraq from 2003 to 2014***

In 2014, ISIS captured the majority of Anbar Province with a degree of speed and ferocity that shocked people around the world. It was this same region that, seven years prior, turned the tide of the Iraq War from one that the US considered lost to one that seemed winnable. This astonishing reversal began in 2006 and largely resulted from the Anbar Awakening and the Surge, which produced a level of stability previously unimaginable and allowed President Obama to frame the US withdrawal in the language of success. Yet, when the US departed, most of its gains evaporated. Within two years, Iraq spiraled back toward civil war. This thesis argues that President Obama's decisions on Iraq—namely his failure to uphold the 2010 election results and negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement—allowed Prime Minister Maliki to act increasingly authoritarian and sectarian, which created the conditions for ISIS to rise.

*Advisor: Professor Rose McDermott, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: Senior Fellow J. Brian Atwood, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

**TALIA B. RUESCHEMEYER-BAILEY: *Do Not Try Giving Birth at Home (in Bolivia): Subnational Variation in Infant Mortality Rates in Bolivia***

In this thesis, I examine why infant mortality rates vary among subnational political units (“departments”) in Bolivia. Although Bolivian departments share a national health policy and the same national resources designated for health, departments varied both in degree of progress and in patterns of trends in infant mortality from 1994 to 2008. This thesis finds that the typical correlates of public health outcomes—wealth, female education, and ethnic fractionalization—do not explain the variation in infant mortality at the subnational level. Instead, the rate of institutional, attended births correlates best with infant mortality rates. Institutional, attended birth rates are a function of two-part action: on the one hand, government appears to have designated and built more health centers, and on the other, citizens appear to have used these health services more often. Both political and cultural factors thus lie behind the subnational variation in infant mortality rates in Bolivia.

*Advisor: Professor Rich Snyder, Political Science*

*Reader: Professor Edward Steinfield, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

**CAMILA RUIZ SEGOVIA: *The Politics of Military Deployment in Contemporary Mexico***

This thesis examines the role of the Mexican Defense Forces in domestic affairs under President Peña Nieto in Mexico (2012-2018). Using mixed methods, the study provides evidence of the expanding role of the military in the provision of public safety in contemporary Mexico. While counter-narcotic efforts drive a significant percentage of military deployments, Peña Nieto has increasingly relied on the Mexican Defense Forces to address concerns unrelated to the “War on Drugs.” Over time, the role of the military has expanded and taken a much more central role in security policy. I argue that, under Peña Nieto, the deployment of the Mexican Defense Forces has intensified and become the main security strategy to address public security

concerns and to impose social order. What this suggests is that drug-driven military deployment can create paths for deployment in other spheres. In other words, once the military is deployed domestically to contain drug violence, it can easily assume other functions.

*Advisor: Professor Peter Andreas, Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*

*Reader: Professor Rich Snyder, Political Science*

### **KATHRYN R. SAMP: *The Problems of Prisons: Theory, Legitimacy, and Abolition***

Why are prisons, which are inherently violent, authoritarian institutions, used in even the most liberal, democratic societies? Can the use of prisons ever be justified? This thesis develops a normative argument against the use of prisons. I argue against prisons from two directions; the first is a moral argument that prisons are fundamentally incompatible with respect for human dignity and autonomy, and the second is a logical argument that there are irreconcilable contradictions between the goals of prisons and what prisons are. I begin with a review of prison abolition literature and develop a definition of exactly what a prison really is. I evaluate the expurgatory function of prisons, or how they remove people from society. I then contend that the ways prisons maintain order and control the lives of inmates is irredeemably unjust. Finally, I argue that the definitional features of prisons are inherently counterproductive to their goals.

*Advisor: Professor Alexander Gourevitch, Political Science*

*Reader: PhD Candidate Michal Ben Noah, Political Science*

### **JORDAN WALLER: *The Role of Regional Identity in the Development of the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone***

This thesis explores the development and entry into force of the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ) and its additional protocol open to ratification by the nuclear-weapon states (NWS). I argue that regional identity played a significant role in the development of the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ). This regional identity was composed of both historical and demographic commonalities, including shared experiences of Russian colonialism, as well as consensus on the importance of nuclear nonproliferation as means to assert regional independence in the post-Soviet period. I contend that a sense of regional identity based on these historical and demographic commonalities preceded the development of CANWFZ, but CANWFZ strengthened these norms. Drawing on the rhetoric of the Central Asian states during the CANWFZ negotiation process, I find that this process also led to the incorporation of importance of nuclear nonproliferation into Central Asian regional identity.

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