**Michael Tomz, Research and Teaching Statement, September 2009**

This document describes my four main research programs and my approach to teaching. For more details about my work, please see my website, www.stanford.edu/~tomz.

## Research Program I: Reputation and International Cooperation

This research program investigates how reputations form and affect international cooperation and conflict. My first contribution to this agenda was *Reputation and International Cooperation: Sovereign Debt across Three Centuries* (Princeton, 2007). I am now extending the research in several directions:

***Preferences and Government Types*:** The theory of reputation I developed in my book assumes that domestic preferences about debt repayment vary across countries and over time. What accounts for these domestic preferences? My manuscript on "Interests, Information, and the Domestic Politics of International Agreements" offers a partial answer. I explain which domestic groups stand to gain—and which groups stand to lose—from repayment, primarily through its effects on fiscal policy and national reputation. I then show, with polling data from Argentina, that citizens' preferences about repayment vary systematically with their exposure to the fiscal and reputational consequences of repayment. This prediction holds mainly for highly informed citizens, however; the policy preferences of less knowledgeable citizens do not reflect their economic interests in default versus repayment. My findings have important implications not only for theories of reputation, but also for representation in democracies. I am now broadening this research to other countries and policy areas. My follow-up work involves surveys I designed for U.S. citizens and cross-national polls I obtained from the U.S. National Archives.

***Context and Economic Shocks*:** In *Reputation and International Cooperation,* I argued that investors study behavior in context, such that the reputational consequences of default or repayment depend on economic circumstances the country faces. I am now looking more generally at how economic conditions affect compliance with debt contracts. Some of this work, joint with Mark Wright, appeared in "Do Countries Default in Bad Times?" (*JEEA* 2007), which used a new dataset covering the years 1820–2004 to estimate the relationship between economic output and sovereign default. Wright and I are working on a follow-up article, which shows that the relationship between output and default is conditional on the degree of slack in international capital markets and on political conditions in the borrowing country. Our work not only addresses key questions in the theoretical literature about sovereign debt, but also has policy implications for forecasting defaults and designing appropriate institutions to address them.

***Reputation and FDI*:** I am also extending my analysis of reputation to other areas of international relations, especially foreign direct investment. For this research, I compiled a new database entitled "A Century of Expropriation," which documents takings of FDI since 1900. I am using the data to investigate how reputation and other incentives vary by type of foreign investment. Mark Wright and I take a first step with "Sovereign Theft: Theory and Evidence about Default and Expropriation" (forthcoming 2010). Using formal models, we analyze how the incentives to default on debt and/or expropriate FDI vary with the state of the economy, the risk aversion of political leaders, and the way reputations operate within and across the two spheres of investment. We then document patterns of default and expropriation across much of the twentieth century. Our research reveals a striking asynchronicity: defaults and expropriations have occurred in alternating, rather than coincident, waves. My next paper in this area will assess the relative importance of reputation versus issue linkage as deterrents to expropriation of FDI.

***Reputation Spillovers*:** I plan to broaden the agenda even further by studying whether and how behavior in one area of international relations "spills over" to affect a government's reputation in other areas. Four methods will help me shed light on this fundamental question. (1) *Laboratory experiments*: I will assign each participant to play a game, such as a trust game, against an opponent. Before play begins, I will manipulate the quantity, content, and cost of information participants receive about their opponent's past behavior, not only on the game they are assigned to play but also on a different game. I will also manipulate the similarity between the assigned game and the "other" game. Ultimately, I will measure much people are willing to pay for their opponent's history on the "other" game, and to what degree such information affects the strategies they employ. (2) *Survey experiments*: I will describe foreign policy situations involving hypothetical or real countries with varying histories of behavior on two issues. Participants will be asked to express their expectations about how the country is likely to behave. These survey experiments, like the laboratory experiments, will generate micro-level evidence about reputational spillovers. (3) *Event studies*: I will use high-frequency market data to study how behavior in one sphere affects expectations in others. One study, currently underway, investigates how expropriation of FDI affects the market prices of sovereign bonds. (4) *Textual analysis*: If observers draw inferences across issues, this pattern should be evident in commentary by political leaders, investors, and the press. I plan to test for such commentary in newspapers and diplomatic documents. These four methods—lab experiments, survey experiments, event studies, and textual analysis—should help reveal the conditions under which reputations travel across issue areas.

## Research Program II: Sources of Credibility: Domestic Audiences and International Law

This research program examines the effects of domestic audiences and international law on the credibility of international commitments. The work is supported by a National Science Foundation CAREER grant.

***Domestic Audiences:*** Do domestic audiences contribute to credibility by punishing leaders for not following through on international commitments? Previous work on this question had been hampered by problems of endogeneity and measurement. In an article in *International Organization* (2007), though, I used experiments to produce the first direct, endogeneity-free estimates of domestic audience costs. I found that audience costs exist across a wide range of conditions and increase with the level of military escalation. The costs are evident throughout the population, and especially among politically active citizens who have the greatest potential to shape government policy. Finally, audience costs arise partly because citizens care about the international reputation of their country or leader.

I recently completed a follow-up study entitled "The Foundations of Domestic Audience Costs: Attitudes, Expectations, and Institutions" (forthcoming 2009). Experiments, embedded in interviews with voters and policymakers, supported three conclusions. First, citizens disparage leaders who escalate crises and then back down. Second, leaders expect this negative reaction from citizens. Members of the British House of Commons were far more likely to anticipate a public backlash when the prime minister climbed down from a threat, than when the prime minister stayed out of a conflict completely. This finding is important because audience costs affect credibility only insofar as political leaders anticipate the costs. Third, domestic political institutions are relevant for audience costs, but the simple distinction between democratic and autocratic regimes is less salient than scholars typically assume. When judging threats by other nations, British MPs believed the domestic penalty for backing down in a military confrontation would be just as high in autocracies as in democracies. They offered many reasons: autocrats depend on a strongman image, cannot share blame as easily as democratic leaders, and are more likely to be killed when ousted. In future work, I plan to disaggregate autocracies based on the presence or absence of institutions for maintaining power, sharing blame, and removing leaders.

Other experiments have led to additional findings: (a) leaders can, through crafted rhetoric, reduce the magnitude of audience costs, but their speeches typically cannot drive audience costs to zero; (b) hostile rhetoric by opposition parties can amplify audience costs and, in some cases, nullify presidential attempts to excuse empty threats; (c) more generally, the magnitude of audience costs varies with the level of elite consensus about foreign policy; and (d) the incidence of audience costs is surprisingly insensitive to party affiliation. I have also confirmed, by running similar experiments in Argentina, that (e) audience costs exist not only in superpowers but also in middle-rank countries, and that (f) it is more costly to back down against a weak adversary such as Paraguay than against a strong adversary such as Great Britain. After reporting some of these findings in articles, I plan to synthesize them in a book.

***International Law***: I have also been using experimental and historical methods to study how international law influences the credibility of international commitments. In a manuscript entitled "The Effect of International Law on Preferences and Beliefs," I offer the first experimental analysis of treaty commitments. My experiments, embedded in interviews with U.S. voters and British policymakers, reveal three patterns. First, international law changes preferences and expectations. Individuals are far more likely to oppose policies that would violate international law than to oppose otherwise identical policies that would not trammel upon the law. Moreover, many observers, including expert policymakers, anticipate that signatories to treaties will behave differently from nonsignatories. Second, these effects arise, at least in part, via a reputational mechanism. By publicizing international commitments and embedding them in a legal framework, treaties raise the reputational ante, making it more costly to renege. Third, the effect of international law is additive, not absolute. If the material or moral case for violating international law is sufficiently strong, large proportions of voters and policymakers will advocate breaking the law and will expect foreign leaders to do the same. Thus, my experiments reveal both the power and the limits of international law.

I am now designing and fielding additional experiments with the following objectives: (a) to better understand the mechanisms by which international law ties the hands of leaders; (b) to investigate how the effects of legalization vary by issue and context; and (c) to develop and test theories about the effects of institutional design on preferences and beliefs. I am also developing a software package with Nico Benitez that will make survey experiments more feasible and economical for research and teaching.

To complement my experimental work on legalization, I have been gathering and analyzing historical data about legal commitments. Judy Goldstein, Doug Rivers, and I used new data to estimate the effects of the GATT, the WTO, and other commercial agreements on international trade (*AER* 2007, *IO* 2007). As a next step, I am studying trade treaties that codify the status quo by taking commercial policies that are already in place and translating them into international law. An analysis of such treaties will help isolate the contribution of international law to credibility. With this goal in mind, I have been compiling a new database entitled “Commerce and the Law before World War II.” The database currently includes MFN agreements, direction of trade, and national accounts for 1920–40.

## Research Program III: Candidate Strategy and Voter Choice

My third research program concerns candidate strategy and voter choice. Robert Van Houweling and I are investigating how voters respond to the policy positions that candidates espouse, and what kinds of policy stances attract the most voters. Our research, which will culminate in a book, is supported by the NSF.

***Clear Policy Positions*****:** In the first stage of this project, Van Houweling and I studied how voters choose when all candidates articulate clear positions. Previous research had suggested three criteria—proximity, direction, and discounting—by which voters might judge candidates’ policy positions. In “Candidate Positioning and Voter Choice” (*APSR* 2008), we explained why existing data and methods were insufficient to estimate the prevalence of these criteria in the electorate. We then formally derived an exhaustive set of critical tests: situations in which the criteria predicted different vote choices. Finally, we administered the tests to a nationally representative sample by embedding experiments in public opinion polls. We found that proximity voting is twice as common as discounting and four times as common as directional voting. Furthermore, discounting is most prevalent among ideological centrists and nonpartisans, who make sophisticated judgments that help align policy with their preferences.

***Ambiguous Policy Positions*****:** In the second stage, Van Houweling and I studied campaigns in which candidates make vague, rather than clear, statements about policies they intend to pursue. Measurement and endogeneity problems had impeded previous empirical research about the consequences of ambiguity. In “The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity” (*APSR* 2009), we overcame these obstacles by conducting survey experiments in which we manipulated the imprecision of candidate positions. Our data show, surprisingly, that ambiguity does not repel and may, in fact, attract voters. Voters who have neutral or positive attitudes toward risk, or who feel uncertain about their own policy preferences, tend to embrace ambiguity in nonpartisan settings. Voters respond even more positively to ambiguity in partisan settings; they optimistically perceive the locations of ambiguous candidates from their own party without pessimistically perceiving the locations of vague candidates from the opposition. We further find, through analysis of two additional new data sets, that candidates often take and voters frequently perceive ambiguous positions like the ones in our experiments. The pervasive use of ambiguity fits our experimental finding that ambiguity can be a winning strategy, especially in partisan elections.

***Inconsistent Policy Positions*:** In the next phase of our research program, we investigated how voters respond when candidates change positions. Our survey experiments, which focused on U.S. tax policy, revealed three patterns. First, position-switching triggers a negative "valence" reaction. Many voters interpret position-switching as evidence of a character flaw and consequently punish candidates for changing their stance. Second, position-switching encourages "discounting." Voters express greater doubt about the current policy statements of candidates who changed positions than of ones who stood firm. Third, although voters dislike inconsistency in general and look skeptically upon the recent promises of inconsistent candidates, position-switching can be profitable. Candidates can, under specific conditions, improve their lot by switching to a position that better resonates with voters. We summarize these findings in a working paper entitled "Candidate Inconsistency and Voter Choice."

***Strategic Repositioning:*** We are now conducting follow-up experiments to quantify the costs and benefits of repositioning on a wide range of issues. One experiment tested the hypothesis that voters react more negatively to repositioning on moral issues than on pragmatic ones. Surprisingly, we found the opposite pattern: the electoral penalty for changing course on pragmatic issues (such as taxes on the rich) was higher than the cost of changing course on moral issues (such as restrictions on abortion). We have developed a formal model that predicts this surprising pattern and many other empirical implications, which we are testing through additional survey experiments.

***Non-Experimental Research:*** In addition to conducting survey experiments, we are studying the positions candidates have taken in actual campaigns. For our paper on "The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity" (*APSR* 2009), we reviewed the transcripts of every primary and general election debate from the 2008 presidential campaign, and we quantified the precision or ambiguity of every statement about tax policy. We are now expanding the research to cover more issues and elections. Over the past year, we have collected transcripts of nearly every presidential debate since 1948. The transcripts, gathered from archives across the United States, will allow us to study position-taking on foreign and domestic issues over more than a half-century. We plan to present our experimental and non-experimental findings in a book about candidate strategy and voter choice.

## Research Program IV: The Sources of Military Conflict

Finally, I am collaborating with Jessica Weeks on a large-scale project about military conflict. Our project has two goals: to substantially increase the quality and quantity of data about military disputes; and, with our new data, to identify the key mechanisms and issues underlying international conflict.

***The MIDipedia Database:*** The Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) dataset is among the most widely used resources in international relations; it has been a key source of evidence for more than 1,800 articles and books. By correcting and expanding the MIDs dataset, Weeks and I are building a firmer foundation for knowledge about international conflict.

Over the past four summers, Weeks and I have been building the *MIDipedia: An Expanded Database of Militarized Interstate Disputes*. With the help of forty students, we have combed historical newspapers, government documents, books, and other sources in pursuit of details about every MID since 1945. As of September 2009, our team has written narratives, corrected existing variables, coded new variables, and provided documentation for approximately 1,200 MIDs. Each narrative includes a chronology of the dispute, records demands the participants made, and summarizes the outcome. In writing these narratives, we discovered and corrected many potentially significant errors—involving dates, participants, fatalities, and other fields—in the canonical MIDs dataset. We also coded many new variables, including the issues at stake, the positions of people who authorized the military action, and the role of nonstate actors. Every MID is now documented with hyperlinks to scanned images of original source material, and the entire database is stored in an internet wiki to facilitate collaboration among researchers.

***Studying Mechanisms:*** Weeks and I are using the *MIDipedia* to test and refine the most prominent explanations for interstate conflict. Researchers have shown, for example, that joint democracy, economic interdependence, and membership in international organizations are negatively associated with military conflict, and have proposed various explanations for these correlations. Unlike existing data, the *MIDipedia* can help explain *why* these correlations exist, because different mechanisms lead to different predictions about the new variables we have been collecting. Some mechanisms should dampen all forms of militarism, including mere threats or displays of force, whereas others should reduce only the actual *use* of military force. Some mechanisms should apply to nonstate actors as well as states, whereas others should pertain only to intergovernmental relations. Some mechanisms should affect the behavior of all public officials, whereas others should influence only elected leaders, etc. Our strategy here, as in my other projects, involves putting each hypothesized mechanism at risk as many times as possible by deriving many empirical implications and testing them against new qualitative and quantitative evidence.

***Studying Issues:*** The *MIDipedia* will also reveal what kinds of issues become the foci of military conflict. Some scholars argue that conflict occurs when the prize is indivisible, thereby preventing participants from finding a bargain that both sides would prefer to war. Others maintain that economic conflicts—arising from protectionism, debt default, expropriation, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation—spill over into military conflict. Still others emphasize the effects of contested borders, religious values, or the desire for political regime change. The existing MIDs dataset does not allow researchers to evaluate these arguments because it contains relatively little information about the issues at stake and provides no specific information about the demands or ultimatums each side delivered. With the *MIDipedia*, we can estimate the proportion of MIDs associated with each type of issue and study how the issues/demands associated with military conflict have evolved over time.

We believe the *MIDipedia* project will advance our understanding of international conflict and provide a rich new database for the scholarly community.

## Undergraduate and Graduate Teaching

I enjoy teaching and have received several honors for my work with students, including the Dean's Award for Distinguished Teaching (2003) and the Cox Medal for Faculty Excellence in Fostering Undergraduate Research (2005), a university-wide award given annually to one Stanford faculty member.

I regularly teach Introduction to International Relations (enrollment of 200–300 undergraduates) and a freshman seminar on The Politics of Economic Development, which is based on a book I edited with Jeffry Frieden and Manuel Pastor. I also teach graduate seminars in international relations theory and international political economy, and I sponsor a Ph.D.-level reading group about voting and elections.

I design my classes to achieve several educational goals: to teach students about major topics in international relations, to sharpen their research and communication skills, and—in the process—to heighten their enthusiasm for the study of politics. My principal strategy for achieving these objectives involves "active learning." Students gain the most, I believe, when they actively participate in discussion and research. I therefore encourage student engagement in all my courses through a variety of techniques, including simulations, in-class debates and conferences, oral presentations, and team research projects.

I strive to promote active learning not only in lectures and seminars, but also in work with students beyond the classroom. For example, I founded and direct the Political Science Program for Undergraduate Research, which involves undergraduates in faculty research projects. As director of the program, I raise about $150,000 annually for student stipends; help match students with appropriate faculty mentors; run a research seminar that meets twice per week throughout the summer; and work closely with undergraduate members of my research team. I have served as formal academic advisor for more than 100 undergraduates; sponsored tutorials for undergraduates to explore special topics; advised students who have garnered prestigious research grants; and supervised honors theses. With support from the NSF, I have also created and run, for four years, a research lab for high school students.

Finally, I have worked closely with graduate students. Some have been my RAs, and others have collaborated with me. I have served on Ph.D. dissertation committees for fourteen students and informally advised many more during office hours and research workshops. It is exciting and rewarding to contribute to the intellectual development of these future leaders of political science.