

I am applying to the doctoral program in political science at the University of Annares with a specialization in comparative politics. My principal interests are the origins, causes, and consequences of political and drug-related violence in Latin America.

To prepare myself for a doctoral program in political science, I have earned a B.A. in government and international politics from Dupont University, and am currently completing my M.A. in political science from Western State University (WSU). At WSU, I have worked as a research assistant for multiple political science professors and I have presented a solo-authored empirical paper at the 2017 Political Science Students Association conference. I also taught Honors Introduction to Government, and I strive to build a collegial graduate cohort through service to the Political Science Graduate Student Association. In addition, I was awarded the Outstanding First Year Master Student Award, the WSU Graduate Research Fellowship (the most prestigious graduate award on campus), and the WSU Pre-Doctoral Scholarship. All of these accomplishments have affirmed my desire to develop into a political scientist.

My research interests include political violence, democratization, and state-cartel peace settlements in Latin America. In my writing sample, I discuss whether political assassinations are more likely to occur in Brazilian states that are not coordinated with the federal government. For this project, I created an original dataset to evaluate statistical evidence of mayoral assassinations across Brazilian states from 2011 to 2016. In another research project, I examine whether drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) tap into Venezuela's oil industry to fund their operations against their opponents. Since conflict with the state and rival crime organizations is weakening and expensive, DTOs have the incentive to undertake less costly activities, such as stealing oil from unprotected pipelines throughout Venezuela. DTOs then resell the oil on the

black market to purchase weaponry that increases their strength vis-à-vis their opponents. I seek to explain the extent to which DTOs behave like insurgencies in contexts of civil war.

My interests align very well with the work of a number of faculty members, including Walter White, Hector Salamanca, and Lydia Rodarte-Quail. Specifically, Dr. White's work challenges the state incoordination hypothesis, and thus encourages me to revisit my research on mayoral assassinations. If the lack of coordination between multiple levels of government does not explain mayoral assassinations, it may be worthwhile to revisit the criminal fragmentation literature to explore how the particular constraints faced by the security and law enforcement agencies influence DTO violence. For example, while fragmentation at the federal level may cause DTO-DTO violence, local fragmentation may be responsible for mayoral assassinations. I am excited to continue investigating these topics as a doctoral student. My interests also intersect with the work of Dr. Salamanca and Dr. Rodarte-Quail, given that my work borrows from research on civil wars and democratization. Dr. Salamanca's work on modeling peace encourages me to explore what factors motivate non-violent citizens to join DTOs and take up arms against the state. Motivated by profits, DTOs are not interested in taking over the state; however, it would be interesting to study with Dr. Salamanca the extent to which DTOs become political in the context of a drug war. Finally, the work of Dr. Rodarte-Quail also aligns closely with my interests in democratization processes and non-state actors. In my writing sample, I build upon literature arguing that democratization causes drug-related violence because competitive Brazilian elections have disrupted the "Pax Mafiosa," a protection racket that the government once offered DTOs when it autocratically ruled Brazilian politics. Moreover, even if Brazil has fully democratized, its democracy is undermined when politicians are assassinated, especially during violent electoral cycles. Overall, working with the University of Annapolis's

faculty will strengthen my methodological skills and broaden my knowledge of civil conflicts and democratization to understand the dynamics of DTO violence.

I am confident that my education and accomplishments have prepared me to undertake doctoral studies, and I look forward to the opportunity to work with the faculty and students at the University of Annars. As a Mexican-American and first-generation student in higher education, my perspective will contribute to the intellectual diversification of both the program and the political science discipline.