

The demobilizing potential of interpersonal conflict in the Pacific

The case of Guam

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Using the case of Guam, the present study examines the politically demobilizing potential of conflict avoidance in the Pacific. An analysis of data from a probability-based mail survey of registered voters ($N = 319$) in Guam revealed that conflict avoidance is inversely associated with political participation, civic engagement, and attention to interpersonal sources of information on a political issue. An inverse relationship between conflict avoidance and attention to the Internet as a source of information on a political issue was also approaching statistical significance. However, conflict avoidance was not associated with neighborliness. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: Conflict avoidance, political and civic engagement, attention to sources of political information

Scholars and local journalists in the Pacific have expressed a concern regarding a lack of political engagement in the islands (e.g., Drage, 1995; Huffer, 2005; Pratt & Smith, 2000; Wong, 2012). Yet there is a dearth of research investigating factors that might be demobilizing Pacific Island residents from participating in politics. One potential inhibitor of political engagement is the tendency to avoid interpersonal conflict (Author, 2012a; McClurg, 2006; McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009; Mutz, 2002). Research conducted in the continental United States, for instance, indicates that conflict's ubiquitous presence in U.S. politics makes conflict-avoidant Americans less interested in politics and less likely to participate in protests and support political campaigns (McClurg, 2006; Ulbig & Funk, 1999).

Using the case of the Western Pacific Island of Guam, the purpose of the present study is to examine whether conflict avoidance inhibits key political and civic behaviors in the Pacific. This study addresses three gaps that remain in the literature on the politically demobilizing role of avoiding interpersonal conflict.

First, previous studies examining the demobilizing effects of conflict avoidance have been predominantly conducted in the continental U.S., which is a culture that tends toward individualism. Limited research has empirically tested this potential among other local communities around the globe, which begs the question of its generalizability to collectivistic cultures, such as those in the Pacific. Second, few studies have analyzed whether the tendency to avoid conflict might hinder other important civic-related behaviors that are presumably less confrontational in nature. These behaviors could include civic engagement and neighborliness. Third, although research implies that exposure to political disagreements via the media and cross-cutting interpersonal social networks might increase political disaffection (McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2002), a corollary concern not satisfactorily addressed by current studies is whether conflict avoidance tendencies may also inhibit one from paying attention to media and interpersonal sources of political information. The present study attempts to fill these noted gaps by examining whether conflict avoidance inhibits Guam residents' political participation, civic engagement, neighborliness, and attention to media and interpersonal sources regarding a local political issue.

To briefly describe Guam, it is an island located about 2,000 miles north of Australia, 3,700 miles west of Hawaii, and 1,500 miles east of the Philippines. The island spans about 33 miles long and 12 miles wide, and is populated by about 160,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2014). According to the 2000 U.S. Census (2014), a majority of Guam's population during that time consisted of Chamorros, the indigenous residents of the island (37.1%), Filipinos (26.3%), and other Pacific Islanders (11.3%). As an unincorporated territory of the U.S., the official and common language of Guam is English. The island also has a three-branch democratic government system, comprising of governor and lieutenant governor, a legislature currently with 15 senators, and a judicial branch.

Conflict avoidance

Interpersonal conflict has been widely studied by scholars representing a number of disciplines (e.g., Blake & Moutan, 1964; Cai & Fink, 2002; Rahim, 1983). Broadly defined, interpersonal conflict is "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals" (Putnam & Poole, 1987, p. 552). Conflict is inherently present in human interactions. As such, individuals are socialized to adopt patterned responses to resolve or manage conflict (Lim, 2009). Scholars have particularly proposed that there are five styles of managing interpersonal conflict (Blake & Moutan, 1964; Rahim, 1983; Thomas, 1976).

Avoidance, the focus of the present study, refers to the refusal of “both overt recognition of a conflict and engagement in any active action toward its resolution” (Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994, p. 1347). In this style of interpersonal conflict management, the individual avoids directly addressing disagreements through such measures as withdrawal, inaction, and suppression of opinions (Rahim, 1983). As such, research shows that conflict avoidance hinders one’s willingness to participate in interpersonal and group discussions (Conrad, 1991; Morris, Williams, Leung, Larrick, et al., 1998; Rahim, 1983). Individuals with an avoidant style of managing conflict avert contentious discussions because they feel doing so helps maintain harmonious personal relationships (Lim, 2009).

Research has also shown that individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in their preferred approach to managing conflict (e.g., Chua & Gudykunst, 1987). Because collectivistic cultures place high value in harmony, social consensus, and interdependence (Hofstede, 1980), collectivists have a greater tendency to adopt a non-confrontational style when addressing interpersonal disagreements with others (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987). Conversely, individualistic cultures place high value in personal goals and independence. Individualists tend to prefer the direct assertion of personal opinions.

Pacific Island cultures are inclined toward collectivistic cultural tendencies (e.g., Bhawuk, 1992; Rogers, 1995). In Guam, for instance, its local residents adhere to collectivistic and traditional values such as reciprocity, obedience to authority, family obligation, social consensus, interdependence, and respect for old age (Department of Chamorro Affairs Research, 2003; Rogers, 1995; Underwood, 1984). Indeed, a core value of the island’s local people is *inafa’maolek* (a word that translates to “make good” in the Chamorro language), which stresses that individuals should emphasize the well-being of their community over their personal needs (Mendiola, 2014). Related to this core value is the avoidance of *mamalao*, or “the shame or embarrassment of a family when one of its members acts in a self-serving or confrontational way” (Rogers, 1995, p. 268). These core values suggest that Guam’s local residents would have a greater tendency to adopt a non-confrontational style when approaching conflict situations.

Political participation, civic engagement, and neighborliness

Political participation refers to “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (Verba, Brady, & Schlozman 1995, p. 38). In addition to voting, political participation also includes other less formal activities such as contacting elected officials,

attending town hall meetings, and making political donations (Verba et al., 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972). These less formal modes of participation are considered effective in political decision-making because they more directly represent the “voice” of citizens and generate pressure on political actors (Verba et al., 1995).

We expect that conflict-avoidant individuals would be more hesitant to participate in political activities than their non-conflict-avoidant counterparts because conflict is a common feature of politics (Mutz, 2002). Decision-making in politics typically involves the expression of differences, disagreements, and grievances (McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2002). As Hayes, Scheufele, and Huges (2006) have held, given that such political activities tend to occur in situations where conflict and disagreement are likely, those who are “averse to volatile social situations” (p. 261) bend toward nonparticipation through self-censorship.

The link between conflict avoidance and non-participation may be more salient in collectivistic communities such as those in the Pacific. Since collectivists are also known to approach interpersonal conflict situations with an avoidant style, Pacific island residents’ aversion toward interpersonal conflict may lead them to avoid engaging in certain political acts (Author, 2012a). In the case of Guam, the tendency toward social consensus and interdependence may inhibit participation in political behaviors. For instance, Rogers (1995) described a teachers’ strike that occurred on Guam in the early 1980s, with a majority of the strikers comprising of teachers who relocated to the island from the U.S. mainland, and who, according to Rogers, tended to be “liberal in outlook, and individualistic in behavior” (p. 267). Rogers explained that Guam’s governor at the time was able to appeal to a large faction to support the government and turn against the strike through noting that the island’s cultural traditions rested not on not by confrontations, but on *inafa’maolek*, or cooperation and interdependence. In sum, we argue that conflict avoidance is a contextual variable that could be playing a role in demobilizing the local residents of the Pacific. We test the following hypothesis:

H1: Conflict avoidance will be inversely associated with political participation.

We also investigate the relationship between conflict avoidance and two less confrontational forms of civic-related behaviors – civic engagement and neighborliness. Civic engagement can be defined as individual or collective behavior aimed at resolving community problems (Putnam, 2000; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli-Carpini, 2006). Civic engagement refers to “membership in formal community groups and participation in social activities” (Shah, 1998, p. 477). It is also conceived as the process of improving one’s community through non-government action. Civic engagement behaviors include belonging to organizations that take a stand on community issues, raising money for charity, or volunteering for nonpolitical groups (Putnam, 2000).

Neighborliness, another less confrontational form of engagement, is defined as the behavior that occurs in social relationships between individuals who live close to each other (Mann, 1954). Neighboring behavior involves various forms of informal interaction, such as inviting neighbors for a cup of coffee or dinner, borrowing from or exchanging things (e.g., shovels, snow scrapers, etc.) with neighbors, and watching over neighbors' children, pets, or properties (Beaudoin, 2007, 2009; Mann, 1954). Although neighboring behavior is said to be declining in today's mobile and anonymous society, human beings are inherently social creatures interdependent on each other to meet various needs.

While we expect conflict avoidance to be related with civic engagement and neighborliness, the direction of this relationship is not entirely clear based on existing research. On the one hand, similar to the expected negative relationship between conflict avoidance and political participation, conflict avoidance may also be inversely linked with the level in which individuals engage in non-political civic acts and neighboring behavior. This expectation is based on studies showing that political participation is positively associated with civic engagement (Shah et al., 2001), and neighborliness is linked with engagement in formal social groups such as community organizations (Perkins et al., 1996) and other political acts such as political outspokenness (Author, 2012a).

On the other hand, civic engagement and neighborly acts such as borrowing or exchanging things may not facilitate contentious discussions. Rather, these behaviors might instead promote friendly and caring ties, a sense of belonging, and emotional attachments with others (Beaudoin, 2009). These behaviors may also protect individuals from a sense of isolation and anxiety, leading to an enrichment of social life (Beaudoin, 2009). In the particular context of Guam, while the core value of *inafa'maolek* discussed above emphasizes a non-assertive approach to conflict situations, which could suppress political participation, this core value also inclines the island's local residents to share a back-and-forth generosity and hospitality with each other (Mendiola, 2014). People on Guam often feel overly obligated to share and reciprocate acts of kindness.

Yet given the limited research exploring the relationship between conflict avoidance and less confrontational forms of political and civic-related behaviors in the Pacific – notably, acts of civic engagement and neighborliness – the following research questions are investigated:

- RQ1: What is the relationship between conflict avoidance and civic engagement?
- RQ2: What is the relationship between conflict avoidance and neighborliness?

Attention to information sources regarding a political issue

Because conflict is inherent in politics (Mutz, 2002), we also propose an inverse relationship between conflict avoidance and attention to media and interpersonal sources of political information. This proposition is derived from various theoretical and research lines. First, Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory suggests that citizens experience discomfort when they are exposed to information that is incongruent with their existing predispositions. This uneasiness leads them to avoid exposure to incongruent information. Consequently, citizens selectively expose themselves to information and sources that reinforce their existing attitudes (Klapper, 1949) and conform to their own predisposed political views (e.g., Goldman & Mutz, 2011).

Yet despite selective tendencies toward attitude-affirming media, the nature of news media coverage of politics itself tends to emphasize conflict by focusing on political strategy and win-lose narratives (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Fallows, 1996). Media coverage of politics focuses on political actors' struggle to reach informed decisions by exchanging different opinions. In addition, the journalistic norms of fair and balanced reporting require newsmakers to present all competing viewpoints, or at least both sides of an issue.

In light of the political disagreements portrayed in the news, research suggests that conflict-laden news coverage increases disaffection toward politics and the political system (Forgette & Morris, 2006). For instance, Mutz and Reeves (2005) explained, "[w]hen political actors engage in televised interactions that violate the norms for everyday, face-to-face discourse, they reaffirm viewers' sense that politicians cannot be counted on to obey the same norms for social behavior by which ordinary citizens abide" (p. 2). Mutz and Reeves revealed evidence that being exposed to uncivil political acts in the media makes one less trusting of political institutions. These findings were reinforced by Forgette and Morris' (2006) study, which indicated that exposure to highly contentious political TV programs (e.g., CNN's *Crossfire*) decreased citizens' trust and support of government. In sum, the increasingly polarized nature and news coverage of politics (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), coupled with the potential that such news coverage might breed political disaffection (Forgette & Morris, 2006), implies conflict-avoidant citizens would have a greater aversion to the public affairs conflicts playing out in the media.

In another vein, studies focusing in interpersonal communication contexts suggest conflict avoidance is a potential inhibitor of attention to political discussion. For instance, research in cross-cutting networks conducted in the U.S. (e.g., Mutz, 2002) reveals that when disagreements occur during interpersonal discussions of politics, this tends to stimulate dissonance. In such circumstances, individuals attempt to reduce dissonance by adopting strategies aimed at achieving

group consensus, including changing their own position or joining a group that holds attitudes congenial toward and similar to their own (Matz & Wood, 2005).

In the Guam context, research suggests that conflict-avoidant residents of the island tend not to express opinions toward contentious political topics in social contexts such as backyard barbecues and community meetings (Author, 2012a). Relatedly, studies have also shown that conflict avoidance hinders one's willingness to discuss politics with others (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). The willingness to discuss politics with others often goes hand-in-hand with being inclined to pay attention to them (e.g., Scheufele, 2000). Hence, because conflict avoidance might inhibit political discussion, it is also reasonable to expect that it may keep one from paying attention to a person discussing politics.

With the above expectations taken into account, we analyze Guam voters' attention to media and interpersonal sources for the purpose of staying informed or learning about an impending U.S. military buildup on the island. The buildup involves the relocation of roughly 5,000 U.S. Marines and 1,300 dependents from Okinawa, Japan to Guam (Fuentes, 2015). Anti-American military sentiments held by Okinawa's people and its local media had prompted the relocation of the Marines to Guam. In 1995, for instance, a kidnapping and gang-raping of a 12-year-old Okinawan girl committed by Marine servicemen in Okinawa inflamed Okinawans' public opinion against the Marines. On Guam, although a number of elected officials and residents endorse the military buildup, others have expressed concerns about its potential negative impacts to the island's environment and culture (Democracy Now, 2009). All of these aspects point to the likelihood that the political issue of the U.S. military buildup on Guam will facilitate polarized discussions in the island's local media and among interpersonal sources.

On balance, the literature reviewed above entails that conflict-avoidant citizens would pay less attention to media and interpersonal sources of political information. Based on the literature, we test the following hypotheses:

H2: Conflict avoidance will be inversely associated with attention to media regarding a political issue.

H3: Conflict avoidance will be inversely associated with attention to interpersonal sources regarding a political issue.

Method

Sample and procedure

The data for this study came from a probability-based representative sample of registered voters of Guam. Data collection occurred in the summer of 2009 through a

self-administered mail survey. The sampling frame was an electoral register, which was obtained from the Guam Election Commission (GEC). According to the GEC director, there were roughly 52,000 registered voters on the island during the time of this survey (personal communication, March 7, 2009). A sample of 1,100 registered voters was randomly drawn from the sampling frame. Because the GEC registered voters list does not include everyone in Guam's population, this results in coverage error (excluding some people from the population). However, using the GEC registered voters list provided an important advantage in that we were certain that the people we sampled were in fact residents of Guam – which establishes the internal validity of our findings for local Guam residents. This was important for our study because Guam has a substantial number of non-local military personnel and dependents that do not self-identify as local residents.

Strategies recommended by Dillman,¹ Smyth, and Christian's (2009) *Tailored Design Method* were used to implement the mail survey. Respondents were first sent a survey mailer during the first week of June 2009 with the following items: a detailed cover letter explaining the importance of the survey, the questionnaire, a self-addressed, stamped return envelope, and a \$1 token incentive. The survey packet was printed on a letterhead displaying the name and logo of the sponsoring U.S. mainland university. A postcard was mailed to the respondents a week after the delivery of the survey packet to express appreciation for those who had completed the survey and ask those who had not to complete and mail it back. Data collection was completed on July 3, 2009. Questionnaires returned thereafter were not included in the present analyses.

One-hundred-seventy-three of the survey packets were not successfully delivered due to such reasons as the relocation or decease of the respondent and the non-existence of address, which reduced the sampling frame to 927. Using the American Association for Public Opinion Research's (2009) response rate 2, the total response rate was 34.4% with a final sample of 319. One-way analyses of variance were conducted to examine whether significant differences would be present in survey responses between questionnaires returned during the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth week. Results showed that the pattern of responses were not significantly different across the data collection period.

1. The authors consulted Dr. Don A. Dillman concerning strategies to conduct a representative community survey on Guam. In the past, Dillman has served as a research consultant in community surveys conducted on Guam.

Measures

Conflict avoidance

Conflict avoidance was measured with the following four items, which also follow the DUTCH conflict instrument format in its focus on non-contextual relationships (Daly, Lee, Soutar, & Rasmi, 2010): (a) I try to avoid open discussions of differences with others; (b) I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with others; (c) I keep disagreements with others to myself in order to prevent disrupting my relationships with them; (d) I generally try to avoid conflict situations with others. The first two items listed above were modified from previous research (Daly et al., 2010; Oetzel, 1998; Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, et al., 2000), while the last two items were created for this study. All responses were measured along a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The four items were found to be reliable ($\alpha = .88$) and combined and averaged to form an index of conflict avoidance ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.54$).

Political participation and civic engagement

Seven items were adapted from Cuillier (2009) to serve as measures of political participation and civic engagement. Responses were measured along a seven-point scale (1 = *not important at all*, 7 = *very important*). The following four items from Cuillier's scale served as measures for political participation, and were combined and averaged to form a single index ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.47$): (a) signing community petitions; (b) attending public meetings, rallies, or speeches; (c) contacting and talking to elected officials; (d) donating money to a political or public interest. The following three items were used as measures of civic engagement and combined and averaged to form a single index ($\alpha = .53$, $M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.31$): (a) volunteering for community organizations; (b) attending religious services;² (c) giving blood.

Neighborliness

Neighborliness was measured with items adapted from Beaudoin and Thorson (2004): (a) within the last year, how often did you borrow or exchange things with your neighbors; (b) within the last year, how often did you visit your neighbors,

2. Note that this item is an acceptable measure of civic engagement on Guam because the island is considerably religious, with 85% of the population identifying themselves as Roman Catholic (CIA, 2012). Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion on Guam as a result of Spanish colonization.

and; (c) within the last year, how often have you and your neighbors helped one another with small tasks, such as repair work. Responses were measured along a seven-point scale (1 = *not often*, 7 = *very often*). The three items were combined and averaged to form an index of neighborliness ($\alpha = .87$, $M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.47$).

Attention to media and interpersonal sources regarding a political issue

Respondents were asked how much attention they paid to the following information sources in order to stay informed or learn about the U.S. military buildup on Guam: (a) the *Pacific Daily News* (the local newspaper with the largest circulation size on Guam); (b) local TV and radio; (c) the Internet; (d) family, and; (e) friends. All responses were measured along a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *not very much*, 7 = *very much*). The three media source items were combined and averaged to form an index of attention to media sources ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.48$). We combined and averaged the two interpersonal source items of “family” and “friends,” which were highly correlated ($r = .90$, $p < .001$), to form an index of attention to interpersonal sources ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.78$).

Controls

The demographic variables of age, sex, education, income, and ethnicity were included as controls in our regression models to evaluate the independent effects of the theoretical variables. Age was measured in an open-ended format (median = 48; $M = 48$, $SD = 15.97$, range 18–88). Sex was measured with females as the high value (56%) and males as the low value (43%). Five respondents did not identify their sex. Income was measured by a seven-point ordinal-scale item (median = “between \$25,000 to \$50,000”). Education was measured by a six-point scale item asking respondents to indicate the highest level of education completed (median = “some college, no degree,” $n = 87$, 27.4%). Ethnicity was measured as Chamorro or indigenous resident of Guam as the high value (53.3%, $n = 169$) and non-Chamorro as the low value (including Filipino, Caucasian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Palauan, and others).

Table 1. Regression results for conflict avoidance as a predictor of political and civic indicators for Guam residents.

	Political Participation	Civic Engagement	Neighborliness	Attention to Media Regarding a Political Issue	Attention to Interpersonal Sources Regarding a Political Issue
Age	.13*	.13*	.04	.13*	.21**
Sex (female)	.05	-.07	.03	.09	.05
Income	-.03	.04	-.02	.02	-.02
Education	-.09	-.03	-.10	.00	.01
Ethnicity (Chamorro)	-.06	-.06	-.01	.04	.01
Conflict Avoidance	-.25***	-.15*	-.05	-.11 ⁺	-.13*
R ²	.09***	.04 ⁺	.02	.04 ⁺	.06**

Note. ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Entries are standardized regression coefficients.

Results

- H1. predicted that conflict avoidance will be inversely associated with political participation. As shown in the regression results on Table 1, H1 was supported. Independent of all other variables in the model, conflict avoidance had a negative effect on political participation ($\beta = -.25, p < .001$). That is, those with more conflict-avoidant tendencies engaged in political activities less frequently. Age was also found to be positively related to political participation ($\beta = .13, p < .05$).
- RQ1. investigated the relationship between conflict avoidance and civic engagement. The regression results in Table 1 show that conflict avoidance was inversely associated with civic engagement ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$). Additionally, age was positively associated with civic engagement ($\beta = .13, p < .05$).
- RQ2. examined the relationship between conflict avoidance and neighborliness. The regression results shown on Table 3 indicate that with age, sex, income, education, and ethnicity simultaneously controlled for, conflict avoidance was not significantly associated with neighborliness.
- H2. predicted an inverse relationship between conflict avoidance and attention to media regarding a political issue. As shown in the results on Table 1, age was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .13, p < .05$), with older respondents

paying greater attention to media to stay informed or to learn about the military buildup issue. The inverse association between conflict avoidance and the measure of attention to media was marginally statistically significant ($\beta = -.11, p < .10$). Further inspection of the zero-order correlations between conflict avoidance and each of the individual items measuring attention to media revealed that conflict avoidance was inversely associated only with attention to the Internet ($r = -.13, p < .05$), and this association was also approaching statistical significance with a subsequent regression analysis controlling for demographics (age, sex, income, education, ethnicity) ($\beta = -.12, p < .10$). On the other hand, the relationships between conflict avoidance and attention to the local newspaper ($r = -.03, n.s.$) and radio and TV news ($r = -.02, n.s.$) were not statistically significant.

- H3. predicted an inverse relationship between conflict avoidance and attention to interpersonal sources regarding a political issue. This hypothesis was supported. Conflict avoidance was negatively associated with the dependent variable ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$), with conflict-avoidant respondents paying lower levels of attention to interpersonal sources to stay informed or learn about the military buildup. Age also was a significant predictor ($\beta = .21, p < .01$).

Discussion

Extant research suggests that because conflict is inherent in politics, individuals who are conflict-avoidant are less interested in politics and less likely to participate in protests and support political campaigns (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). To date, however, limited research has tested the demobilizing role of conflict avoidance in contexts outside of the continental U.S. In an attempt to investigate the applicability of the findings from these lines of research in an international context, the present study analyzed survey data from Guam and examined conflict avoidance's relationship with several key indicators of a strong and functioning democracy. Our findings contribute to the conflict management and political mobilization literature in a number of ways.

First, this study found that Guam residents' conflict avoidance was inversely associated with their political participation. This extends past research that indicates the conflict-ridden nature of politics inclines conflict-avoidant persons to abstain from politics (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Political participation behaviors often contain some form of public behavior that may expose an individual to criticism, which the conflict-avoidant person may seek to avoid (Hayes et al., 2006). Our findings provide evidence for the generalizability of past research on the politically demobilizing potential of conflict avoidance (e.g., Ulbig & Funk, 1999), showing

that this notion can also be applied to places adhering to core cultural values that emphasize the well-being of a community over individual needs (e.g., Guam and islands similar to it).

Second, the present study suggested that conflict avoidance was inversely associated with civic engagement. Past research has demonstrated a link between political participation and civic engagement (Shah et al., 2001). Conflict avoidance and political participation are known to be inversely associated (Mutz, 2002). However, limited research had previously explored a possible link between civic engagement and conflict avoidance. It appears there may be a common feature between civic and political participation that the conflict-avoidant person finds repelling. Future research can thus further explore this dynamic.

Third, this study revealed that conflict avoidance was not associated with being more or less neighborly. This non-significant relationship could be due in part because neighborly activities do not necessarily involve conflict. Indeed, previous work has shown high levels of political homogeneity within neighborhoods (e.g., Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Mutz and Mondak (2006), for instance, showed neighborhoods foster less cross-cutting participation than other contexts such as the workplace. Also, unlike other forms of participation, neighborliness is characterized by informal social relationships between those living close to each other such as helping neighbors with small tasks and inviting or visiting neighbors for dinner. On Guam, in particular, the core cultural value of *inafa'maolek* may be fostering social consensus, reciprocity, hospitality, and generosity among neighboring relationships, which in turn, could be minimizing the likelihood of conflict among neighbors. Because of its casual and friendly nature, neighborliness may not be likely to trigger conflict-avoidant traits to the extent to which individuals avoid having such interaction.

Fourth, this study found that conflict avoidance was inversely associated with attention to the Internet as a source to learn about a political issue on Guam – the U.S. military buildup. However, the relationships between conflict avoidance and attention to the local newspaper and radio and TV news were not statistically significant. We offer explanations for these findings. First, the concept of structural pluralism, as extended by media sociologists Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1980), explains that conflict in larger and more heterogeneous communities such as metropolitan areas is regulated through the “airing out” or public expression of differences. Therefore, mainstream media of such communities are more likely to report on conflict. On the other hand, conflict in smaller and more homogenous communities such as small towns is downplayed or avoided by their mainstream media. Although we expected Guam’s media to report frequently about conflicts regarding the military buildup, arguably, Guam is a small and homogenous Pacific Island, and as such, its mainstream media may have the potential of reporting

conflict with limited frequency and prominence. Therefore, we can surmise that conflict avoidance did not inhibit registered voters on Guam from paying attention to the PDN and broadcast news regarding the buildup because these mainstream news sources' reports on the buildup downplayed conflict and thus were not highly contentious. To examine this idea, future studies should examine the relationship between conflict avoidance and a diverse range of other potentially contentious issues that are likely to be covered in other places around the world (e.g., climate change, same-sex marriage). In addition, future studies can be conducted in larger, more heterogeneous communities that may be more likely to "air out" or publicly express differences.

Yet this study provides some evidence that conflict-avoidant persons are less likely to use the Internet for information about the buildup. Because our findings were marginally statistically significant, we interpret these results with caution. Nevertheless, past studies have uncovered a tendency for Internet discussants to engage in uncivil discussion in online chat communities and discussion boards (Davis, 1999), and recent research suggests exposure to online incivility can foster polarization (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014). Conflict is prevalent in online sources of news, as these sources increasingly contain comments sections and forums where discussion and debate occurs, such as on the video-sharing site YouTube (Moor & Heuvelman, 2010) and on discussion forums on news outlets (Chmiel, Sobkowicz, Sienkiewicz, Paltoglou, et al., 2010). Further, many blogs are partisan and opinionated, and their readers, and thus those commenting on their blog posts, tend to be partisan supporters (Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010). Due to the many potential avenues for encountering conflict on the Internet, the conflict-avoidant person may seek to avoid the web as a source of news about a contentious issue. This warrants further investigation with respect to how conflict avoidance could potentially hinder attention to Internet sources of political news. Unfortunately, our study did not parse Internet news consumption into sub components. Because there are many information sources on the Internet, we were unable to determine specifically what Internet sources may be contributing to conflict avoidance.

Finally, this study revealed that conflict-avoidant respondents paid less attention to interpersonal sources to stay informed about the military buildup. This finding extends to an international-collectivistic context, the assumption that disagreement in interpersonal sources stimulates dissonance, and strategies to achieve group consensus are used to help reduce this negative tension (Matz & Wood, 2005).

Limitations, directions for future research, and conclusion

Some limitations need to be addressed. First, the sample used in our study was restricted to registered voters, which might limit the generalizability of the results to the entire adult population of Guam. Indeed, the Guam registered voters list did not include everyone in Guam's population, and consequently, this leads to the concern of coverage error (excluding some people from the population), which could lead to questions about the generalizability of our findings. For instance, registered voters may have higher levels of political and civic interest or community involvement than unregistered voters. In addition, the median age of our sample was 48 years, which is above that of the U.S. Census median age for Guam (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2015) and might have possibly contributed to underrepresentation of younger age groups' opinions and behaviors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that younger age groups on Guam may be less conflict-avoidant prone and more engaged in greater offline and online activism against the buildup. This is respectively reinforced by significant positive zero-order correlations between age and conflict avoidance ($r = .18, p < .01$) and age and attention to the Internet as an information source to learn about the buildup ($r = -.12, p < .05$) found in our study. Although we did enter age as a predictor in our regression models, there is still the potential that the relationships between conflict avoidance and our outcome variables – notably, attention to the Internet for news regarding the buildup – may be different among younger age groups. As such, we recommend that future research employ samples from a list of everyone in the population of Guam (e.g., the U.S. Census list). Future research may also consider focusing on younger age groups.

Along similar lines, Guam's local residents adhere to traditional, collectivistic values such as interdependence, social consensus, respect for old age, reciprocity, and family obligation (Rogers, 1995), all of which speaks to close ties between family members on Guam. Thus, we recommend that future cross-cultural studies should be conducted to test the generalizability of our findings across several cultural groups.

Second, the present study's use of cross-sectional data limits what can be said about causality between these variables. We suggest that future research employing controlled experiments further examine the causal claims we make in this study.

Third, one might argue that the measures for civic engagement were limited because they did not fully capture differing dimensions of this behavior, and the alpha reliability for the civic engagement index was marginal. Therefore, we suggest that future studies incorporate differing dimensions of civic engagement adopted from established measures of this construct.

Fifth, the measures of attention to the Internet used in our study did not parse the various possible Internet sources. Future studies should examine the many possible information sources available on the Web, including traditional news sources, social media, and discussion forums.

Sixth, research also shows that those who have the tendency to seek out conflict may also be more likely to be active in politics (McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009). Therefore, future studies may examine the relationship between conflict-seeking and attention to public affairs news and other political behaviors.

Seventh, conflict avoidance is only one of five styles of managing interpersonal conflict (Rahim, 1983). We recommend that studies examine the relationships of the other four styles of conflict management (accommodation, collaboration, competition, compromise) with political behaviors.

Finally, our study was grounded in the assumption that collectivistic tendencies – notably, those stemming from the indigenous core value of *inafa'maolek* – would drive Guam's residents to be more conflict avoidant. However, we acknowledge that our survey did not include measures of collectivism or *inafa'maolek*. If it is the case that the spectrum of collectivism impacts the relationship between conflict avoidance and political behavior, future research should investigate its impact in this process.

With the above limitations considered, this study extends scholarly understanding of the relationship between conflict avoidance, attention to political information sources, and important indicators of a vibrant political community. By extending research into an international context, this study helps expand the otherwise relatively narrow focus of conflict avoidance research, highlighting key considerations of collectivistic cultures and media reporting on conflict in small, homogenous cultures. Political participation is important to the success of democracy. This study helps shed light on one factor that may be contributing to disengagement in civics. We therefore conclude that conflict avoidance is an important variable to consider when studying communication, political, and civic behaviors.

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