The Trump Taboo Test: Elite Rhetoric and the Normative Foundations of American Grand Strategy

Christopher Gelpi

The Ohio State University

And

Elias Assaf

The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

Recent research has called into question the strength of taboos against nuclear weapon use and proliferation that have supported a nuclear foreign policy consensus in recent history (Press et. al. 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017). However, this work has relied on empirical tests that prime members of the public with fictitious scenarios that are stripped of real political stakes and context. We therefore conducted an experiment in the lead up to the 2016 Presidential Election that made use of Donald Trumps' unprecedented media statements regarding nuclear weapons. This test allows us to model the impact of challenges to traditional nuclear weapons norms within the context of a highly polarized presidential election, where the synergy between policy and partisan interest can further influence opinions – posing a hard-test for these norms. We find that nuclear norms are more robust than initially hypothesized; both Republicans and Democrats reject the prime to abandon these norms and only change their opinions about the non-taboo nuclear issue of The Iran Nuclear Deal. However, we do see some cause for concern in that the perceived importance of nuclear non-proliferation is diminished among Republicans primed with a cue that allies should acquire the weapon.

The dominant feature of American foreign policy over the past 70 years has been its overall consistency. The stability of American foreign policy is rooted in bipartisan support for a stable grand strategy that has shaped American international behavior since at least the end of World War II (Gavin 2105, Brands and Feaver 2016). This grand strategy, in turn, has been anchored in a broad set of norms that serve as a foundation and a justification for America's role in the world.

Donald Trump built his rise to the White House on his opposition to the American political establishment – both Republican and Democratic. And as President he continues to appear intent on a complete reformulation of American grand strategy. Candidate Trump questioned our commitments to NATO allies, supported the spread of nuclear weapons to countries like Japan and South Korea, and remarked that he would consider using nuclear weapons to attack ISIS. President-Elect Trump continued this trend of challenging bipartisan foreign policy norms by calling into question America's long-standing support for the "one China" policy. And President Trump quickly withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, attempted to ban immigration from certain majority-Muslim countries, and moved to expand the border wall with Mexico.

All of these policies are inconsistent with typical Republican positions on these issues. Moreover, President Trump's policy stances are well outside a stable and long-established bipartisan consensus that has guided American grand strategy through Democratic and Republican administrations for the past half-century or more. Part of Trump's reshaping of American foreign policy has been a direct assault on the norms that justify this bipartisan consensus – including economic openness, the legitimacy of international institutions, and

the management of nuclear security through the norms of non-proliferation and no first use.

As President and Commander-in-Chief, Mr. Trump has wide leeway to implement his preferred foreign policy regardless of its (un)popularity in the short term. However, if he is to succeed in reshaping American grand strategy in the longer term, Mr. Trump will need to persuade a substantial segment of the American public to support his policies. Thus President Trump's ability to maintain support for his unorthodox approach to foreign policy, as well as his ability to implement longer-term changes in America's international orientation will depend significantly on at least three factors: 1) how strong is popular support for the normative foundations of American grand strategy; 2) how persuadable is the public regarding changes to these long-standing bipartisan policies; and finally 3) how much more successful might Donald Trump be than a typical politician in his ability to rally public support these unorthodox views?

Our study focuses specifically on nuclear weapons norms, which have been a stable foundation of American grand strategy for more than half a century, and have been our primary means for promoting American interests and security while limiting the possibility of nuclear war. Recent research on the norm against the first-use of nuclear weapons raise important questions about the robustness of this norm (Press et. al. 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017), making it even more important that we understand the implications of Trump's attempt to change course.

This valuable research has a limitation however, as it is based on hypothetical questions about imagined scenarios. In contrast, our study makes use of unprecedented statements made around the time of the 2016 presidential campaign to observe how opinions may

change in response to violation of these norms in a real-world context. One could image that the added salience of an elite cue from a real presidential candidate would further soften the foundations of the norm as real-world tradeoffs overwhelm the prohibition against the weapon. Alternatively, the real-world risks of nuclear proliferation or use in the context of a concrete and immediate test case might make the norm more salient and increase adherence.

In the weeks leading up to the 2016 American Presidential election, we conducted an experiment that randomly assigned participants to read news stories about Republican candidates making foreign policy statements. The experiment compares the impact of elite rhetoric on popular attitudes regarding a typical partisan nuclear issue to their impact on attitudes that undergird the normative foundations of American nuclear strategy. Half of the stories attributed the statements to Donald Trump, and the other half attributed the statements to Paul Evans, a fictional Republican candidate for U.S. Senate. Participants read news stories on one of three topics: criticizing the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran, supporting the development of nuclear weapons by Japan, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia, and using nuclear weapons to destroy ISIS. The Iran deal story represents a typical Republican foreign policy position, while the other two stories present significant challenges to the norms supporting American nuclear strategy.

It is important here to understand both the scope of this work and how it informs broader questions about U.S. grand strategy that are of interest to all scholars in international relations. The goal of this experiment is neither to predict a particular foreign policy decision in the realm of nuclear proliferation and use, nor any in other taboo context. Instead, we endeavor to understand how permissive the public is (or can become) with

regard to taboo foreign policy options, such as the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons. The executive can decide to enact a policy in a particular case independent of input from the public. However, continued support from the electorate is essential to maintaining a grand strategy trajectory over many years. This is the time horizon that defines a grand strategy and its international outcomes, and is therefore also the scale at which variables of interest can be used to understand its formation and changes to its underlying values and components. In other words, the public may not have a voice in supporting or opposing a particular decision as it is made, but the taboo context that restricts decision making in the long-term — either by imposing lagged costs or making some decisions unthinkable — arises from prolonged and sustained commitment to a norm within the democratic public (Page and Shapiro 1992; Aldrich et al. 2006). It is therefore essential that we understand how stable these norms are in the face of short-term challenges by politicians, as the stability of these opinions shapes international interactions well into the future.

Consequently, the goal of this study is to understand whether or not the public will follow a single opinion leader that acts in opposition to the established taboos that shape American Grand Strategy. The leader must break from widely held convention in order to face the opposition embedded in these test criteria. This is different from just tapping into the party line and highlighting a conflict with the opposition. Instead, the opinion leader that is seeking to overturn an established foreign policy taboo long-term must introduce new rhetoric that prioritizes key values in competition with the ones enshrined in that taboo. Note also that if neither major party has historically prioritized these key values over the ones embedded in the taboo, it is likely because they both believe that they have

an electoral interest in aligning themselves with the status-quo. Otherwise, they would have abandoned the taboo in response to their constituencies' preferences. We can therefore be confident that if the party eventually does adopt these competing values over the taboo, it is likely in response to an opinion leader gaining ground with the public — either through persuasion or by showing the party that the electorate is seeking a move away from the status-quo in its representation. Any subsequent persuasion of the party is therefore secondary, as the taboo has already been overturned, or shown to be obsolete, by the original opinion leader. If a single opinion leader does somehow manage to shift the entire party away from its platform, without first persuading the public, then the magnitude of the challenge to the taboo is different from the one we seek to test in this paper. However, the strategic interest parties have in accurately aligning with their constituencies would also render this unlikely domino effect a non-starter, as the party still in adherence to the widely held taboo would exert significant electoral costs on the taboo-breakers.

Our results present a mixture of good news and bad news regarding the popular foundations of American grand strategy. First, our results indicate that the principles of American nuclear strategy are generally – but not universally – popular. Second, we find that Trump did not differ from our fictional "generic" Republican candidate in terms of his ability to alter public attitudes. Consequently, we find that Trump is likely to be able to use the bully pulpit of the White House to rally Republicans and some independents to support typical Republican policy positions. On the other hand, our results indicate that President Trump will have difficulty persuading the public to abandon the norms that undergird American nuclear policy.

Nuclear Weapons and the Foundations of American Grand Strategy

Nuclear non-proliferation has been a centerpiece of American grand strategy almost since the moment of the Japanese surrender in World War II (Gavin 2015). This policy preference is rooted in very practical material advantages that non-proliferation provides the United States. First, containing the spread of nuclear weapons limits American vulnerability to a nuclear strike by limiting the number of actors who are capable of such an attack – either intentionally or inadvertently. Second, nuclear non-proliferation enhances America's ability to project power around the world. The fate of the three "Axis of Evil" regimes singled out by George W. Bush in his 2002 State of the Union speech illustrate this fact. Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled before it was able to muster a credible nuclear program. Iranian leaders made sufficient progress on a bomb that the United States was forced – prior to the Trump administration - to negotiate an agreement with them. And North Korea's successful detonation of a weapon has left them essentially immune from American influence. Finally, non-proliferation limits the likelihood that a violent non-state group will obtain a weapon, which would be especially dangerous because they might be more difficult to deter than a state actor (Allison 2004).

The American material interest in non-proliferation is quite straightforward, but persuading the rest of the world to support such a policy proved more complex. Beginning as early as 1946 with the Baruch Plan, American diplomats set about embedding non-proliferation and an American monopoly on nuclear weapons into international law. The failure of the Baruch plan was eventually followed by President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" policy which led to the creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor international nuclear activity in 1957. After more fitful progress on a partial

nuclear test ban and other low level nuclear cooperation with the Soviet Union, the superpowers were able to square the normative circle of condemning the spread of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states while simultaneously maintaining that capacity for themselves through the negotiation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970.

The text of the NPT establishes nuclear non-proliferation as a normative good from which all states benefit by "considering the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples." (IAEA, 1970). The treaty then asserts the shared belief "that the proliferation of nuclear weapons would seriously enhance the danger of nuclear war." The remainder of the document describes the core of the deal: non-nuclear weapons states agree not to acquire these weapons (Article II) in exchange for a promise from the nuclear weapons states that they will not transfer this technology to non-nuclear states (Article I), and they will "negotiate in good faith" to work toward "nuclear disarmament and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control" (Article VI).

The acceptance of the goal of global nuclear disarmament was the price that the superpowers paid in order to instantiate the goal of non-proliferation in international law and to infuse that goal with normative content. Since that time American presidents have consistently endorsed the norm of a nuclear-free world, even if they have not achieved that goal. Staunchly conservative Republicans such as Ronald Reagan endorsed this goal repeatedly, including as a part of his 1985 inaugural address. Similarly, liberal Democrats such as Barack Obama called for a world without nuclear weapons and for, "a future in

which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare but as the start of our own moral awakening." ("Text of President Obama's Speech in Hiroshima," 2016) The American public appears to have internalized the normative imperative of global disarmament. A 2005 IPSOS Associated Press poll found that 66% of Americans believed that no country – including the United States – should be allowed to have nuclear weapons. (AP/IPSOS, 2005)

Viewed in this context, Donald Trump's rhetoric on nuclear proliferation calls into question this longstanding American commitment to non-proliferation as part of progress toward a world without nuclear weapons. In April of 2016, candidate Trump declared nuclear proliferation "inevitable," and argued that proliferation was actually in America's strategic interests. Wittingly or not, these campaign statements cut to the core of one of the normative pillars of American grand strategy.

Like non-proliferation, the normative proscription against the first-use of nuclear weapons has been a longstanding foundation of American foreign policy. However, the "nuclear taboo" did not take root quite as quickly as the American goal of limiting proliferation. In the throes of World War II, both the Roosevelt and Truman administrations always assumed that they would use the atomic bomb as soon as it was available (Bernstein 1975), and American leaders continued to consider the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear targets well into the 1950's (Foot 1985; Betts 1987, Trachtenberg 1988). President Eisenhower, for example, publicly insistent that nuclear weapons were ordinary military tools, to be "used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else." (Tannenwald 2007:9) Similarly, surveys conducted in the early years of the

Cold War suggested that the American public did not view the use of nuclear weapons to be illegitimate (Sagan and Valentino 2017).

Over time, however, the attitudes of both mass publics and elites have changed dramatically in this regard. Tannenwald (1999, 2007) argues that the Vietnam war was a critical turning point in this regard. Robert McNamara, for example, stated that the US "never seriously considered using nuclear weapons in Vietnam." (quoted in Tannewald 1999:451) And Dean Rusk insisted that he would never participate in the first use of nuclear weapons, except possibly in response to a massive Soviet invasion of Western Europe (Tannenwald 199:451). By the end of the Cold War, Tannenwald (1999, 2007) concludes that the norm against nuclear first use was so strongly entrenched among American decision-making elites that nuclear weapons were fundamentally unusable for any purpose other than nuclear deterrence.

The norm against nuclear first use became even stronger than the norm against nuclear proliferation, because of the way in with it connected and overlapped with the strengthening norm against killing non-combatants (Sagan and Valentino 2017) as well as some of the central tenets of just war theory (Walzer 2015). For example, Thomas (2001) argues that the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki helped to set in motion a growing revulsion against the killing of non-combatants in war. This trend strengthened gradually in the post-World War II era, such that Pinker (2012) came to argue that violence is globally on the decline. More specifically, Pinker argues that an increase in empathy and changes in what is perceived as "civilized" behavior has led to a decreasing popular tolerance for violence, especially against non-combatants. And finally, the first use of nuclear weapons – especially against a non-nuclear state – would seem to

violate the principle of proportionality that is central to just war theory (Walzer 2015).

These reinforcing norms led Tannewald (1999, 2007) and others (e.g. Schelling 1994) to

label the norm against first use a "nuclear taboo." That is, nuclear first-use was more than

just unwise or even undesirable. According to these scholars, nuclear first-use had become

unacceptable and even unthinkable for most Americans.

The American public expressed broad support for the nuclear taboo by the early years

of the 21st century. For example, in March 2004 a Knowledge Networks poll found that 60%

of Americans felt that the U.S. should only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear

attack, and 21% felt that the U.S. should not use nuclear weapons under any circumstances.

Only 18% were willing to countenance first-use under any circumstances. (Kull et. al.,

2004). This poll result is particularly striking because it was taken in the midst of an

ongoing war in Iraq that was going very poorly for the United States.

Campaign Rhetoric and a Real-World Stress Test for Nuclear Norms

In order to function effectively, norms require broad - but not universal - support.

However, the strength of a norm lies primarily in its depth rather than its breadth. That is,

the best place to observe the strength of a norm is by observing behavior in the wake of its

violation (Gelpi 1997, Kratochwil 1991; Franck 1990). Thus, the best way to observe the

strength of public commitment to the nuclear norms underpinning American grand

strategy, is to observe how public opinion responds to their violation. Does the public

quickly abandon these views when they are inconvenient or when they feel the opportunity

or an obligation to violate them?

Previous academic research on public support for the nuclear taboo suggested that the

norm against first use was reasonably widely held, but not deeply ingrained (Press et. al.

2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017). For example, most members of the public would prefer not to use nuclear weapons when all else is equal, but if nuclear weapons are perceived as more effective, then the aversion to their use declined sharply. All else is, of course, rarely equal, and so these findings raised important questions about how the American public would respond to a leader - like Donald Trump - who actually considered a nuclear first strike. Even less is known about how the public would respond to calls for nuclear proliferation.

As noted above, one important limitation of previous work in this area is that it is all based on hypothetical questions about an imagined scenario. The use of such scenarios was necessary because no mainstream American politician had advocated either for nuclear first use or for proliferation. However, the rise of Donald Trump to the Presidency during 2016, creates both the opportunity and the necessity to observe public responses to elite calls for the violation of these norms in a real-world context. The crystallization of these policy positions, and their communication to the public by a plausible political candidate, makes the challenge to these norms both more politically salient, and more forceful than they would be under hypothetical scenarios.

While responses to hypothetical questions can be useful, and may be necessary in order to study questions without plausible policy referents, there are important reasons to wonder whether responses to policy questions may shift when they move from the realm of the hypothetical into the realm of current events. On the one hand, the placement of a normative question – such as proliferation or first use – into a real political debate creates the opportunity for countervailing concerns or specific contextual factors that may undermine the persuasiveness (or perceived relevance) of the norm. On the other hand,

some individuals who say that they would support violating a norm in the context of a hypothetical scenario may back away from that support if they believe it might have real-world consequences. That is, violating norms in a hypothetical scenario may seem a safe and purely expressive act. But the real-world possibility of the norm being violated may be viewed as costly and unadvisable.

Donald Trump's 2016 Presidential campaign gave both the non-proliferation norm and the nuclear taboo their first real-world stress tests in many decades. In order to understand how this opportunity allows us to test the robustness of popular support for these nuclear norms, we turn to the literature on elite cues and public opinion in the context of political campaigns.

In principle, elections create democratic representation and accountability by allowing citizens to express their support for candidates who express their preferred policy positions on a portfolio of issues (Enelow and Hinich 1984; Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989; Aldrich et. al. 1989; Kenny and Loftinia 2005). In practice, however, we know that citizens have hold on to limited amounts of factual information about politics (Carini and Keeter 1991), and their attitudes can be shaped by rhetorical cues from partisan elites (Zaller 1992). In particular, Gabriel Lenz (2009) argues that we often observe a strong correlation between candidate platforms and voter issue positions not because voters select candidates who share their preferences, but rather because voters adopt the issue stances of candidates that they prefer for partisan reasons.

Lenz's work builds on an extensive literature that emphasizes the public's strong reliance on elite partisan opinions in the formation of their attitudes and beliefs (Zaller and Feldman, 1992; Zaller, 1992; Bartels 2002). Studies of "priming effects," for example, have

shown substantial elite influence on individual attitudes (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990; Mendelberg 2001; Druckman and Holmes, 2004). Similarly, numerous studies of "framing effects" indicate that individual attitudes toward the use of military force can be altered through the provision of narrative frames (Iyengar and Simon, 1993; Allen, O'Laughlin and Sullivan, 1994; Herrmann, Tetlock and Visser, 1999; Aday, Cluverius and Livingston, 2005; Boettcher and Cobb 2006; Berkinsky and Kinder, 2006). And Lenz (2009, 2013) argues that we often observe a strong correlation between candidate platforms and voter issue positions not because voters select candidates who share their preferences, but rather because voters adopt the issue stances of candidates that they prefer for other reasons.

Co-partisanship represents a strong sense of identity in the context of a political campaign. Espousing policy positions that differ substantially from a candidate with whom one shares partisan identity creates burdensome cognitive dissonance that voters will be motivated to avoid. Consequently, examining public responses to elite rhetoric that advocates nuclear proliferation and first use provides a nearly ideal test for the robustness of these norms that has been heretofore impossible to conduct in a truly realistic fashion.

Co-partisans who receive a message from their candidate regarding nuclear proliferation or first use should feel strong pressure to express this same view. The impact of this identity should be especially strong during the 2016 presidential campaign because of the extremely high level of political polarization that has come to permeate nearly every aspect of American public life (Jacobson 2007, 2010; Iyengar et. al 2012; Popescu 2103, Doherty 2014; Iyengar and Westwood 2015).

This argument suggests that co-partisans will feel the strong pressure to align their views to match those of their party's candidate in the context of an election. If the norms of nuclear non-proliferation and no first use are weakly held and internalized, then we should expect voters to respond to these cues in exactly the same manner that they do to partisan messaging on other issues: 1) Co-partisans should rally to support the candidate's position; 2) partisan opponents should ignore the message; and 3) independent voters should be somewhere in between.

Weak Norm Hypothesis: Republicans will express increased support for violating nuclear norms in response to campaign rhetoric that conflicts with those norms.

However, other work on American public opinion and foreign policy suggests that citizens are – at least under some circumstances – capable of forming and retaining attitudes that are independent of elite preferences, even when they feel pressured by elite rhetoric on the issue. For example, Mueller's (1971, 1973) seminal work on casualties and public support for the Vietnam and Korean Wars implied that the public formed coherent and systematic judgments about foreign policy events. Subsequent research on attitudes toward military conflict concluded that the public can form reasoned and "prudent" attitudes that are shaped more powerfully by information about real-world events than they are by elite partisan rhetoric (Jentleson 1992; Gartner and Segura 1998; Gelpi et. al. 2005, 2009; Gartner 2008; Gelpi 2010). This research is rooted in a broader literature suggesting that the public appears to respond in systematic and reasonable ways to

information about foreign policy events. (Nincic 1992; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1992; Aldrich et. al. 2006).

The public's capacity to form attitudes that remain independent of elites give us reason to believe that public support for non-proliferation and the nuclear taboo may be strong enough to resist elite encouragement to violate them. If the American public has strongly internalized the norms against nuclear proliferation and first use, then the "rational public" literature suggests that they will respond positively to elite cues that conform with their prior beliefs, but will resist cues that conflict with strongly held attitudes – especially if those attitudes are underpinned by a strong normative commitment. This argument suggests that elite rhetoric will alter Republican support for the Iran nuclear deal, but will not influence Republican attitudes about non-proliferation and nuclear first use.

Strong Norm Hypothesis: Republicans will *not* express increased support for violating nuclear norms in response to campaign rhetoric that conflicts with those norms.

Finally, we expect that support for the norm against nuclear first use will be stronger and more robust than the norm against nuclear proliferation. As noted above, the norm against first use is also supported by strengthening norms against killing non-combatants as well as basic tenets of just war theory such as the requirement of proportionality. While the argument for non-proliferation ultimately rests on a normative claim about the catastrophic nature of nuclear war, the act of proliferation is at least one step removed from such an outcome. The actual preemptive or preventive use of nuclear weapons,

however, would lead immediately and directly to the kind of massive and disproportionate civilian death that elevates first use to the level of a "taboo." (Tannenwald 1999, 2007)

Nuclear Taboo Hypothesis: Elite rhetoric regarding the use of nuclear weapons will elicit less public response than elite rhetoric regarding nuclear proliferation.

Research Design and Measurements

We examine the robustness of public attitudes toward the nuclear norms at the foundations of American strategy through an analysis of a survey experiment conducted during the week leading up to the 2016 presidential election. Our sample includes 1,567 adults from the United States who were contacted during the week leading up to the 2016 presidential election. The samples were collected online through Qualtrics. Subjects were selected so as to include equal numbers of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents (as well as an equal number of men and women). We collected our sample in this way because we expect that responses to elite rhetoric may vary based on the partisanship of the participant.

Our experiment was a 2x3 between subjects design as described in Figure 1. Participants begin by completing a consent form, a demographics questionnaire, and a series of questions probing independent variables of interest (such as hawkish or dovish foreign policy orientation). They are then randomly assigned to one of six treatment categories along two dimensions: assigned "speaker," and assigned "issue." Participants in the Donald Trump speaker category read a version of their randomly assigned article where Donald Trump is quoted on the issue at hand, either: The nuclear deal with Iran,

nuclear proliferation to other countries, or potentially striking ISIS with a nuclear weapon. Conversely, participants assigned to the Paul Evans speaker category read an edited version of their randomly assigned article in which the same quote is attributed to a (fictitious) candidate for Senate named Paul Evans. Beyond seeing his photograph, all that is known about Paul Evans is that he is a Republican. After being assigned to one of these six groups, and reading the assigned news article, participants' issue positions and other dependent variables of interest are retrieved. They are then debriefed and the experiment is concluded.

Figure 1 About Here

Our three stories were created using actual news stories presented in the lead up to the election by such outlets as CNN and The New York Times. Each of these articles includes a set of direct quotes from Donald Trump. Specifically, the articles cover: 1) Trump's criticisms of The Iran nuclear deal (a mainstream Republican position); 2) Trump's statements in support of Japan acquiring its own nuclear weapons (breaking the norm of nuclear non-proliferation); and 3) Trump entertaining the idea of using a nuclear weapon against ISIS (breaking the nuclear taboo). Thus, our treatments include exposure to two issue positions that violate nuclear norms, while our control exposes subjects to a typical Republican issue position regarding nuclear weapons.

Although our treatments constitute a single instance of persuasion, and citizens are exposed to a myriad of messages each day, we have two key reasons to believe that our experiment remains externally valid. First, our treatments are taken verbatim from real-world statements made by the president. This is unusual given that two of these statements (regarding non-proliferation and first-use) communicate policy positions that have

historically been outside of the bipartisan consensus on nuclear weapons. Our treatments therefore have a direct connection to real-world politics, whereas any studies on nuclear taboos performed before Donald Trump made these statements would have no choice but to fabricate statements to serve as manipulations that lie outside of this consensus. This makes our experiment uniquely informative and externally valid.

Second, our treatments change opinions on the Iran Nuclear Deal among republicans. This single prime in our news story moves opinions among constituents and does not affect the opposition party. This is exactly what we would expect if the treatment were effectual. Although citizens may take in many political messages in aggregate from day to day, the fact that their opinions are solicited immediately following treatment allows us to observe the particular experimental effect we are looking for across subjects. If our prime were not an effective treatment, then we would not observe any differences across our subjects. The fact that noise exists outside of the lab does not diminish the fact that our treatment effect is real and its impact on opinions is substantively large enough to be observable with high statistical certainty across our sample.

Paul Evans serves as our control category across two important dimensions, allowing us to see the effects of the same issue-area statements while abstracting away: 1) Donald Trumps' personal appeal to voters (such as through personality traits or name recognition); and 2) any ideological orientations that distinguish Trump from a generic or "mainstream" member of the republican party. Paul Evans is a clean control in this way because his inclusion allows us to measure the effects of these same statements had they been made by a generic republican candidate - with no personal appeal (or cause for evasion) and no ideological points to distinguish him from the rest of the party. In other

words, Paul Evans shows us what a mainstream republican might expect if they took on these same rhetorical stances on nuclear weapons. It is important to note that the absence of a speaker (and therefore of any issue-area cue) would not be an appropriate control category against which to measure our effects. This is because a pure control category would simply retrieve peoples' prior attitudes without manipulation, and would tell us little about the efficacy of our treatments either in terms of the salience and potency of Trumps' unconventional nuclear rhetoric, or the efficacy of the nuclear issue prime. Additionally, having a democrat as a control would not serve as an appropriate baseline because these same statements would constitute a significant deviation from mainstream democratic foreign policy positions (as stated throughout the primary campaigns), and would also introduce the confounding consideration of party loyalty.

There exists a second control category within the design as well: The Iran nuclear deal issue area article. Specifically, since this treatment category does not prime norm-breaking in foreign policy, it allows us to measure the effects of such a policy against a baseline of a mainstream republican nuclear policy. Here, again, our control category removes the variable of interest (norm-breaking) from the equation while still presenting an argument regarding nuclear policy that any generic republican candidate would make. In much the same way as the Paul Evans control, The Iran deal article gives us identification by removing the specific policy considerations that play into nuclear proliferation and nuclear weapon use (but importantly, while also priming nuclear threat in general). This control group is therefore a key part of understanding how norm-breaking in the domain of nuclear weapons affects political attitudes. A control group that did not prime nuclear

considerations would fail to meet these criteria, and therefore would not be helpful in testing our theory.[1]

After reading the assigned article, each participant answered several questions about their views on nuclear weapons issues. With regard to the Iran deal, we asked subjects, "Do you think the nuclear deal with Iran makes the world safer or less safe?" With regard to nuclear non-proliferation, we asked subjects, "Do you favor or oppose the goal of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons, which is stated in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)?" Additionally, we asked how important a goal do you think preventing the spread of nuclear weapons should be for American foreign policy. This second question provides a yet more difficult test for the robustness of the non-proliferation norm, because it allows co-partisans to respond to the elite message regarding proliferation without directly violating the norm. That is, Republican subjects could ease their cognitive dissonance by downgrading the importance of nuclear proliferation in their mind rather than directly endorsing a violation of the norm.

Finally, regarding the norm against first use of nuclear weapons, we asked, "If you had to choose, do you think the U.S. should only use nuclear weapons if an enemy uses them against the U.S. first, or do you think the U.S. should be willing to use nuclear weapons first, even if no enemy has used them against the U.S.?" This question directly captures the core of the nuclear taboo, but once again we asked a second question to provide a more difficult test of the norm. Previous research indicates that individuals may be willing to violate norms in a real-world scenario even if they claim to support them in principle (Prothro and Grigg 1960; Sullivan et. al. 1982). Moreover, support for the no first use norm may decline

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[1] Treatment and control stories are available from the authors upon request.

when subjects must trade off their support for the norm against a likely cost in American lives or battlefield effectiveness (Sagan et. al. 2017). Consequently, we also asked subjects a more concrete question about the use of nuclear weapons that connected directly to the news story in our experimental treatment. Specifically, we asked: "Some Americans favor the use of tactical nuclear weapons against ISIS as a way to quickly end the conflict and save lives. Others oppose first use of nuclear weapons as immoral and likely to make other nations eager to develop nuclear weapons of their own. Which comes closer to your view?"

There are at least four major characteristics of this design that let us test our hypotheses effectively. First, we present one mainstream and two taboo positions in the same issue area of nuclear weapons and national security. We therefore vary issue stances while controlling for issue area. This means that we can see if expressing a taboo, as opposed to a mainstream position, hurts the persuasiveness of the speakers. Second, we are able to see if these effects vary based on the strength of the norm that is being broken. Allowing for the proliferation of nuclear weapons to Japan is normatively proscribed because it may raise the probability of civilian death in a nuclear conflict. In contrast, actually using a nuclear weapon preemptively or preventively would involve directly inflicting that level of damage to civilians with certainty. Consequently, we expect the non-proliferation norm to be weaker than the norm against first use, as the former is a stepping stone to the latter. Third, by running a parallel set of treatments with Paul Evans as a second speaker we can see if these effects vary by Republican candidate. Specifically, we can address the question of whether Donald Trump is unusual in his ability to rally the public (and Republicans in particular) to support unorthodox policies. Finally, by relying on treatments that are very close to "real world" news stories, we improve the external

validity of our design. As noted above, because credible threats to use nuclear weapons have been rare, most systematic tests of the "nuclear taboo" have relied on questioning subjects regarding hypothetical scenarios. While such studies are useful, it can be difficult to know whether subjects can accurately anticipate how they would react to a hypothetical scenario. The unorthodox nature of the Trump campaign gives us an opportunity to observe how Americans respond to real proposals to spread or use nuclear weapons in highly salient scenarios.

Randomization of assignment was very effective in creating balanced treatment and control groups. Respondents' demographic characteristics and other attitudes for the Trump and Evans condition are described by treatment condition in Table 1. All participants self-reported their political party affiliation (Republican, democrat, independent, or something else), political ideology (five items from very liberal to very conservative), age (categorical intervals), sex (male or female), race (categorical), level of education (highest degree achieved), employment type (including two indicators for unemployment duration), and whether or not they have served on active military duty. Foreign policy hawkishness is also measured through self-report on a ten-point scale, where participants are asked if the United States should be very reluctant (one) or ready and willing (ten) to use military force around the world. Political knowledge is measured as the number of correct responses participants give to four factual political questions identifying John Kerry, Paul Ryan, and Joe Biden's political positions, and identifying that Republicans hold the U.S. Senate in 2016. Finally, we coded two binary indicator variables for our analyses, one for being white (from the race question) and another for being

unemployed (coded one for selecting "out of work for more than one year" or "out of work for less than one year" for employment type).

Table 1 About Here

We found no statistically significant differences whatsoever across any of these potentially confounding variables across the treatment and control groups for our Paul Evans condition. For the Trump condition, we found that the treated groups (proliferation, and nuclear first-use) were slightly older than the control group (Iran deal), but the difference is not substantively large. Moreover, given that we were checking for associations within ten confounding variables across two experiments, it is not surprising (and perhaps even expected) to find one association that is statistically significant at the .05 level. Thus, we find that the treatment and control groups in both of our experimental samples are well-balanced across a wide variety of plausible confounders.

While our experimental subjects are not a probability sample of American voters, they are broadly representative of the American public on a variety of dimensions. We deliberately structured our sample to be evenly divided among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents because we suspected that our treatment effects might vary across these groups. However, this division also roughly comports with Gallup's finding that 27% of their respondents identified as Republican in October 2016, while 32% identified as Democrats, and 36% as Independents (Gallup 2017). Moreover, when compared to 2015 data from the US Census Bureau (2015), we find that 56% of our subjects were between the ages of 18 and 44, as compared to 54% of all American adults. Women constitute 50.3% of our sample, as compared to 50.8% of the public. Similarly, 78% of our subjects were non-hispanic Whites, who make up 77% of the US population. And approximately 7% of

our subjects were unemployed at the time of the study, while the unemployment rate in the US was 4.9% in October of 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017).

Our subjects did differ significantly from the American public on a few dimensions. In particular, our sample was somewhat more educated than the public at large. Specifically, 45% of our subjects over the age of 25 held a Bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to 30% of Americans over age 25 according to the Census. Additionally, 13% of our subjects were either current or former members of the US military, while only about 6% of the American population were veterans in 2016.

Finally, although our sample is not nationally representative, we can speak to treatment effects across subjects in our sample. These treatment effects show the efficacy of our manipulations and point to a causal mechanism, rather than serving to measure public opinion in aggregate. Although there is a strong need for a nationally representative sample in the latter case, our work is focused on isolating the mechanism by which a specific political norm is supported or challenged. In the interest of exploring that mechanism, we randomly assign participants to treatment categories and isolate the effect of changing a single variable at a time in order to observe its relationship to our outcome. The fact that our sample is not nationally representative does not have any bearing on our ability to draw conclusion about this set of treatments within our sample (Field and Hole 2013). This is why an experimental sample is appropriate to answer our question and to provide a compelling argument for a particular causal mechanism for prompting change.

Empirical Results

We begin with our analysis of whether Donald Trump differs from a generic Republican candidate in his ability to mobilize public opinion. For this stage of the analysis, we divided

our subjects according to the policy statements they received, and then compared the responses of those who had the statements attributed to Donald Trump to those who had the statements attributed to Paul Evans. A simple cross-tabulation of the responses quickly suggests that Trump is very much an ordinary Republican with regard to his impact on public opinion. For example, subjects who read criticism of the Iran deal attributed to Donald Trump were about 5% less likely to say that the deal made the world less safe than if they read the same criticism from Paul Evans. Subjects who received the Trump treatment regarding non-proliferation treatment were less than 1% more likely to state that they opposed the NPT. And those who read Trump's rhetoric regarding nuclear weapons and ISIS were about 5% less likely to support the preemptive or preventive use of nuclear weapons. None of these differences were statistically significant.

In order to be sure that Trump's persuasive powers were not being masked by minor variations in the potentially confounding covariates described in Table 1, we conducted multivariate analyses comparing the persuasiveness of each of the policy treatments from Trump and Evans. Complete results for these multivariate analyses are displayed in Appendix A, but Figure 1 displays the estimated regression coefficients for Trump's persuasive effects relative to Evans. The dots in the figure identify Trump's estimated relative persuasion on issue. Positive estimates indicate that subjects expressed views closer to those in the news article when the rhetoric was attributed to Trump. Negative coefficients indicate that subjects expressed attitudes closer to the treatment rhetoric when it was attribute to Evans. The black vertical bars indicate the 95% confidence intervals around those estimates.

Figure 2 About Here

As was the case with the bivariate results, Trump was slightly less persuasive than Evans with regard to the Iran deal and nuclear first use, but slightly more persuasive regarding non-proliferation. Most importantly, however, we can see that the estimated confidence intervals easily encompass zero for all of the policy treatments. Clearly, when forming their attitudes toward nuclear issues, our subjects did not respond to the policy positions identified in the news stories any differently when the statements were attributed to Donald Trump as opposed to the fictional Paul Evans. Consequently, when evaluating the impact of the policy positions we pool together subjects in the Trump and Evans treatments both for ease of presentation and in order to avoid unnecessarily wasting statistical power. The results remain unchanged if we analyze subjects in the Trump and Evans conditions separately.[2]

Next, we turn our attention to our central question: the impact of elite rhetoric on public attitudes toward the nuclear norms. We test our hypotheses with a series of simple logistic regressions regarding the impact of each of our three rhetorical treatments on each of our three partisan groups of respondents. We rely on ordered logit models because each of our dependent variables is ordinally ranked. Rather than impose any structure on our estimation of the impact of our rhetorical treatments or partisan groups, we measure both variables with a set of categorical dummy variables. Since our randomization was very successful in creating balance across treatment and control groups, we did not include control variables in our estimation of the treatment effects. However, the addition of all of the confounding variables described in Table 1 had no impact on our estimated treatment

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[2] Trump does slightly better with Republicans than Evans, while Evans does modestly better than Trump with Democrats and Independents. However, none of these differences are statistically significant.

effects. Results of the analyses including potential confounders are displayed in Appendix B.

We begin with the analysis of a typical partisan foreign policy issue: the Iran nuclear deal. Figure 3 displays the estimated probability that a subject from each partisan group would state that the Iran deal made the world less safe depending on the rhetorical cue that they received. The circles depict the estimated probabilities of Democratic, independent, and Republican subjects stating that the Iran deal makes the world "less safe" and the blue, purple, and red markers refer to Democrats, independents, and Republicans respectively. The vertical bars represent the 95% confidence intervals for the estimated probability of opposition within each group.

Figure 3 About Here

Overall, we find that the Iran nuclear deal is not especially popular with our subjects. Specifically, over 52% of our respondents stated that the deal made the world "less safe." Even among Democrats just over 40% of our subjects stated that the deal made the world less safe. As expected for a typical partisan issue, opposition to the Iran deal differs sharply by party. The probability of opposition is higher for Republicans than democrats across all of our rhetorical treatments, and the confidence intervals around these estimates do not overlap across party lines. Independents are in between Democrats and Republicans in their opposition.

Our hypotheses, however, focus more directly on differences in opposition across rhetorical treatments within each of our partisan groups. As expected, Democrats completely ignore cues from Republican politicians when expressing their views. Specifically, Democratic subjects had almost exactly a 40% probability of opposing the deal

regardless of whether they are exposed to the Republican critique of the deal or statements about nuclear non-proliferation or first use. Independents, however, responded moderately to exposure to Republican rhetoric on the deal. Independents have a 58% probability of opposition to the deal in response to the Iran deal statement, as compared to a nearly 46% chance of opposition following exposure to the proliferation cue and a 53% probability of opposition following exposure to the first use cue. Neither of these differences are statistically significant, although the difference between the Iran deal and proliferation conditions is substantively large.

Republicans, however, respond sharply to rhetoric from their party leaders (real or fictional) criticizing the deal. Even in the absence of exposure to the anti-deal message, Republican opposition is at 63% and 57% for the proliferation and first use cues respectively. But exposure to the Iran deal treatment raises this opposition to 78%. This large increase in skepticism about the deal is statistically significant at the .01 level.

Thus public attitudes toward the Iran deal respond precisely as expected by the elite rhetoric literature. Republicans rally strongly in opposition to the deal when exposed to Republican elite criticism, independents respond weakly, and Democrats do not respond at all. This result is not surprising, since the Iran deal is clearly a positional issue with a well-established partisan divide. But how will the public respond when elite partisan rhetoric breaks longstanding patterns of bipartisan agreement and challenges widely held normative foundations of American nuclear strategy?

First, unlike the Iran nuclear deal, we find that Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is generally quite popular with our subjects. Specifically, only 21% of our respondents expressed opposition to the core principle of the NPT. Moreover, as expected, support for

the NPT varies less across party lines, with 17% of Democrats, 17% of Independents, and 27% of Republicans opposing the treaty. This partisan difference between Republicans and Democrats is statistically significant, but is barely one-third of the size of the partisan gap on the Iran deal.

Figure 4 About Here

Figure 4 displays the probability that our subjects will oppose the principles of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by party identification in response to each news treatment. We focus our attention primarily on the distinction between responses to the proliferation rhetoric and our control condition, the Iran deal. Here we see that when elite rhetoric moves outside the boundaries of typical partisan debate, it loses its ability to persuade or rally even strong co-partisans. Democrats have just a 14% probability of opposing the NPT after reading the Iran deal story, and this probability remains essentially unchanged at 16% if they read a Republican critique of non-proliferation. Similarly, 20% of Independents who read about the Iran Deal oppose the principles of the NPT, as do a slightly lower 18% of those exposed to Trump's endorsement of proliferation. These changes are not statistically significant.

Most importantly, however, the probability of Republican opposition to the principles of the NPT actually declines from 29% to 24% in response to the change from the Iran to the NPT news stories. The decline is not statistically significant, but it does stand in stark contrast to the Republican response to a more typical partisan cue such as Trump's comments on the Iran deal. Thus, while not all Republicans endorse the non-proliferation norm at the core of the NPT, those who do appear to have internalized their support for the norm strongly enough that rhetoric from a co-partisan elite cannot alter their support.

Figure 4 demonstrates that the non-proliferation norm has some sticking power with the public even when elites endorse its violation, but we looked deeper to see if Trump's rhetoric could shake public support for this norm in more subtle ways. Figure 5 displays the predicted probability that our subjects will state that nuclear non-proliferation should be a "very important" goal for American foreign policy. Once again, we focus on the distinction between the Iran and proliferation cues. Here we see some responsiveness among Independents and especially Republicans to the anti-NPT cue. When subjects received the Iran deal message, Republicans had a 77% probability of stating that nuclear non-proliferation is "very important," while the probabilities for Democrats and Independents were 73% and 69% respectively. Democrats still had a 72% probability of stating that non-proliferation is "very important" when exposed to Republican rhetoric undermining this position. But Independents and Republicans became less likely to rate non-proliferation as "very important" after reading the Trump/Evans statement on proliferation. Specifically, the probability that Republicans would rate non-proliferation as "very important" dropped to 57%, while the same probability for independents dropped to 58%. The 20% drop in Republican support is statistically significant at the .01 level. The 11% drop among Independents does not quite reach statistical significance.

Figure 5 About Here

These results suggest that while Trump's rhetoric did not persuade Republican or Independent supporters of the NPT to abandon their view, it did cause them to downplay the importance of this issue somewhat. In the longer term, of course, a declining sense of the importance of non-proliferation among the public could lead to an erosion in the norm's status. If the norm declined in importance in the public mind, it is theoretically

possible that partisan affiliation, military expediency, or some other contingency could lead individuals to abandon their support of the normative goal of non-proliferation and a nuclear free world.

Finally, we turn to our analysis of the robustness of the nuclear taboo. As previous research has indicated, we find that the nuclear taboo is not a universally held view among the American public. Overall, we find that 27% of our subjects expressed support for preemptive or preventive nuclear strikes by the United States as a matter of principle. Moreover, we continue to see a partisan divide on this issue. Approximately 38% of Republicans supported the principle of a preemptive or preventive nuclear strike, but only about 20% of Democrats did so. This partisan gap is statistically significant, and somewhat larger than the partisan divide on the NPT, but it remains much smaller than the divide over the Iran deal. Moreover, across party lines we see that support for the taboo against nuclear first use is the modal position.

Figure 6 About Here

Figure 6 displays the probability that our subjects in each partisan group would express principled support for the idea of a nuclear first strike. In this case, we focus our attention on the comparison between responses to the first use cue and our control condition, the rhetoric on the Iran deal. As was the case for the principles of the NPT, elite Republican rhetoric has no mobilizing effect undermining the no first use norm. Specifically, Democrats who read the Iran deal news story had an 18% probability of supporting the first use of nuclear weapons, and this probability remained essentially unchanged at 19% among Democrats who were exposed to Republican advocacy for a nuclear first strike. Similarly, we find that Independents exposed to the Iran deal story had a 28% probability of

supporting the principle of a nuclear first strike, but that probability dropped to 24% among independents who read the first strike story.

Even among Republicans we see no evidence that the first use cue undermined support for this norm. The probability of support for first use among Republicans is fairly high at 40% when subjects receive the Iran deal cue. But the likelihood of support for this policy actually dropped by 8% when Republicans heard either Trump or Evans advocate a nuclear preventive strike on ISIS. Once again, Republicans who expressed support for the norm appear to have internalized the attitude sufficiently that they did not respond to elite co-partisan cues encouraging them to change their view.

On balance, these results seem encouraging for those who support the nuclear taboo, the normative underpinnings of American nuclear strategy, and American grand strategy as it stands more generally. However, supporting the principle of no first use and supporting the policy in practice may not be the same thing (Press et. al. 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017). For example, individuals who express support for the norm of free speech, may be very willing to silence the voices of those with whom they disagree (Prothro and Grigg 1960; Sullivan et. al. 1982). Moreover, policy questions – including those regarding the use of nuclear weapons – are never resolved in principle. They must always be implemented in practice. So perhaps elite rhetoric would have encouraged some of our subjects to support violating the nuclear taboo in practice, even if they continued to espouse support for the no first use principle.

In order to address this question, we also asked our subjects about the specific nuclear first use scenario highlighted in our experimental treatment: a preventive strike against ISIS. Specifically, we asked, "Some Americans favor the use of tactical nuclear weapons

against ISIS as a way to quickly end the conflict and save lives. Others oppose first-use of nuclear weapons as immoral and likely to make other nations eager to develop nuclear weapons of their own. Which comes closer to your view?"

Note that this wording gives respondents permission either to support or oppose a nuclear strike on ISIS by letting them know that other people had taken either side of the issue. Moreover, the question provided them with both normative and practical arguments on each side of the issue. The question gives subjects the opportunity to justify first use both as a way to save lives and as a practical means to end the conflict swiftly. At the same time, the question reminds them of the moral proscription against first use in the nuclear taboo as well as the practical argument that first use would fuel nuclear proliferation. Finally, by focusing on ISIS – a terrorist group that is widely reviled and was responsible for terrorist attacks on U.S. soil – the question gives subjects maximal room to respond to the elite cue.

Figure 7 Around Here

Figure 7 displays the probability that our subjects will support a nuclear first strike against ISIS by party identification and by news treatment. Once again, we focus on the comparison between the Iran and first use cues. Here we can see that the transition from principle to practice does lead some additional subjects to support a nuclear first strike. Overall, about 31% of our respondents expressed support for a nuclear first strike against ISIS, as compared to 27% who expressed support for a first strike in principle. This increase in support exists across party affiliation. Both Democrats and Republicans were about 5% more likely to support first use when ISIS is mentioned.

However, despite the increases in support for a first strike, we see that elite rhetoric continues to have no impact on attitudes toward nuclear first use, even in the context of a real-world scenario involving ISIS. The probability of Democratic support for a nuclear strike against ISIS drops from 23% to 22% when they are exposed to Republican rhetoric advocating the strike as opposed to reading a statement on the Iran deal. And the probability of support among Independents remains constant at 24% in response to the first use cue. Most importantly, probability of Republican support for a strike against ISIS drops from 44% to 43% when they are exposed to Trump or Evans advocating for the strike instead of rhetoric on the Iran deal. None of these changes approach standard levels of statistical significance.

Thus, like Sagan et. al. (2017; see also Sagan and Valentino 2013), we find that a significant segment of the American public is willing to support a nuclear first strike under some plausible real-world scenarios. Moreover, we also find evidence of some partisan divide over this issue, with a substantial number of Republicans expressing opposition to the taboo, and even more expressing a willingness to violate the norm in practice. At the same time, our results also demonstrate that Republican support for nuclear non-proliferation and the nuclear taboo does appear to be quite stable. That is, those Republicans who support the norm appear to have internalized its values sufficiently that their attitude cannot be swayed by elite co-partisan messaging, even in the midst of an intense and hotly tested presidential campaign.

Taken as a whole, our results support the "strong norm" hypothesis, as well as the "taboo" hypothesis. Both the NPT and the nuclear taboo are generally quite popular with the American public. Moreover, in the midst of a very closely contested and extremely

bitter partisan campaign, Republican rhetoric undermining these norms had no impact whatsoever on Republican support for these principles, despite the fact that Republicans were the least supportive partisan group in our sample. The one point of weakness for the non-proliferation and no first use norms was that Republicans did reduce their estimate of the importance of the NPT in response to partisan critiques. In the longer term, one could imagine that a secular decline in public perceptions of the importance of the NPT could eventually open the door to undermining support for its principles altogether.

Public attitudes toward nuclear no first use, however, were almost entirely impervious to the effects of elite rhetoric. Support for first use might be higher than advocates of the nuclear taboo would like to observe – especially within the Republican party. But overall support for the taboo among our subjects was fairly strong, and Republican supporters of no first use were not affected by campaign rhetoric pressing them to change their view. Even when we asked about a specific scenario involving a first-strike against a reviled and threatening terrorist group and reminded subjects of the expediency of a strike, Republican supporters of the nuclear taboo were unmoved by partisan rhetoric. Thus, while public support for non-proliferation and the nuclear taboo are by no means universal, support for those norms appears to be reasonably robust. President Trump will have his work cut out for him if he wishes to undermine public support for those norms in the longer run.

Conclusions

Many aspects of American foreign policy have developed a "taken for granted" quality among observers and analysts of international politics. Among the most important of these points of consensus are the norms underpinning U.S. nuclear strategy. The rise of Donald Trump to the White House raises both the need and the opportunity to examine the

robustness of popular support for the norms of nuclear non-proliferation and no first use. Trump's rhetoric directly critiqued both of these norms in the context of an intensely partisan presidential campaign, creating an opportunity to observe Republican commitments to these norms.

While we do observe some significant partisan variation in support for the NPT and the nuclear taboo, our results also suggest that those who endorse the nuclear norms appear to have internalized their beliefs strongly enough to resist pressure from co-partisan elites to change their views. Our results regarding the perceived importance of the NPT reveal some signs of weakness for this norm, but the overall pattern of results suggests some independent thinking on the part of the public. Moreover, our results suggest that President Trump may be swimming against a fairly strong popular current if he seeks to alter American grand strategy with regard to nuclear weapons.

Table 1: Analysis of Variance Across Treatment Conditions

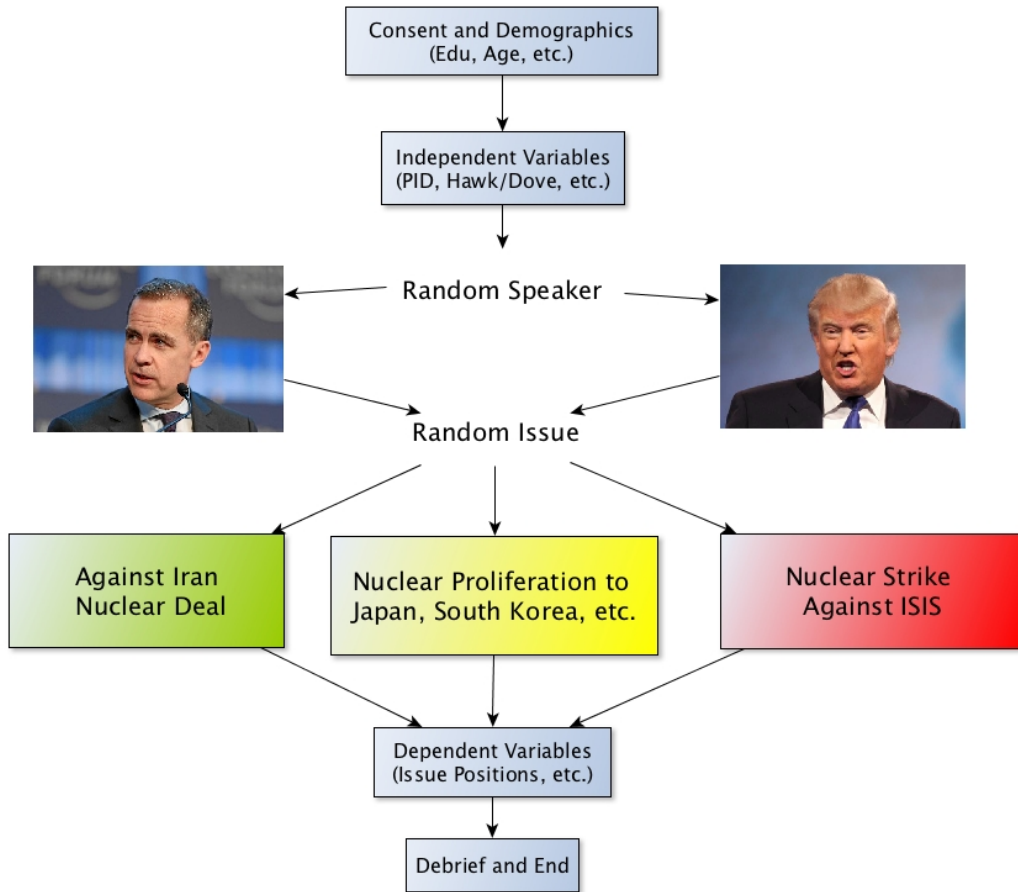|	Iran Deal	Nuclear Proliferation	Strike ISIS	P-value
Paul Evans				
Republican	0.351	0.332	0.372	0.631
Ideology	3.188	3.261	3.23	0.733
Age	5.621	5.119	5.291	0.189
Education	3.543	3.373	3.426	0.307
Unemployment	0.070	0.082	0.074	0.871
White	0.813	0.772	0.822	0.320
Sex	1.488	1.515	1.508	0.821
Military Experience	0.113	0.142	0.112	0.505
Hawk or Dove	5.770	5.586	5.628	0.751
Political Knowledge	2.805	2.821	2.686	0.446
Donald Trump				
Republican	0.301	0.292	0.330	0.601
Ideology	3.170	3.314	3.222	0.331
Age	4.703	5.310	5.337	0.036*
Education	3.427	3.467	3.312	0.506
Unemployment	0.081	0.066	0.068	0.802
White	0.763	0.771	0.753	0.878
Sex	1.513	1.483	1.513	0.739
Military Experience	0.136	0.111	0.125	0.692
Hawk or Dove	5.508	5.561	5.581	0.951
Political Knowledge	2.564	2.616	2.652	0.760

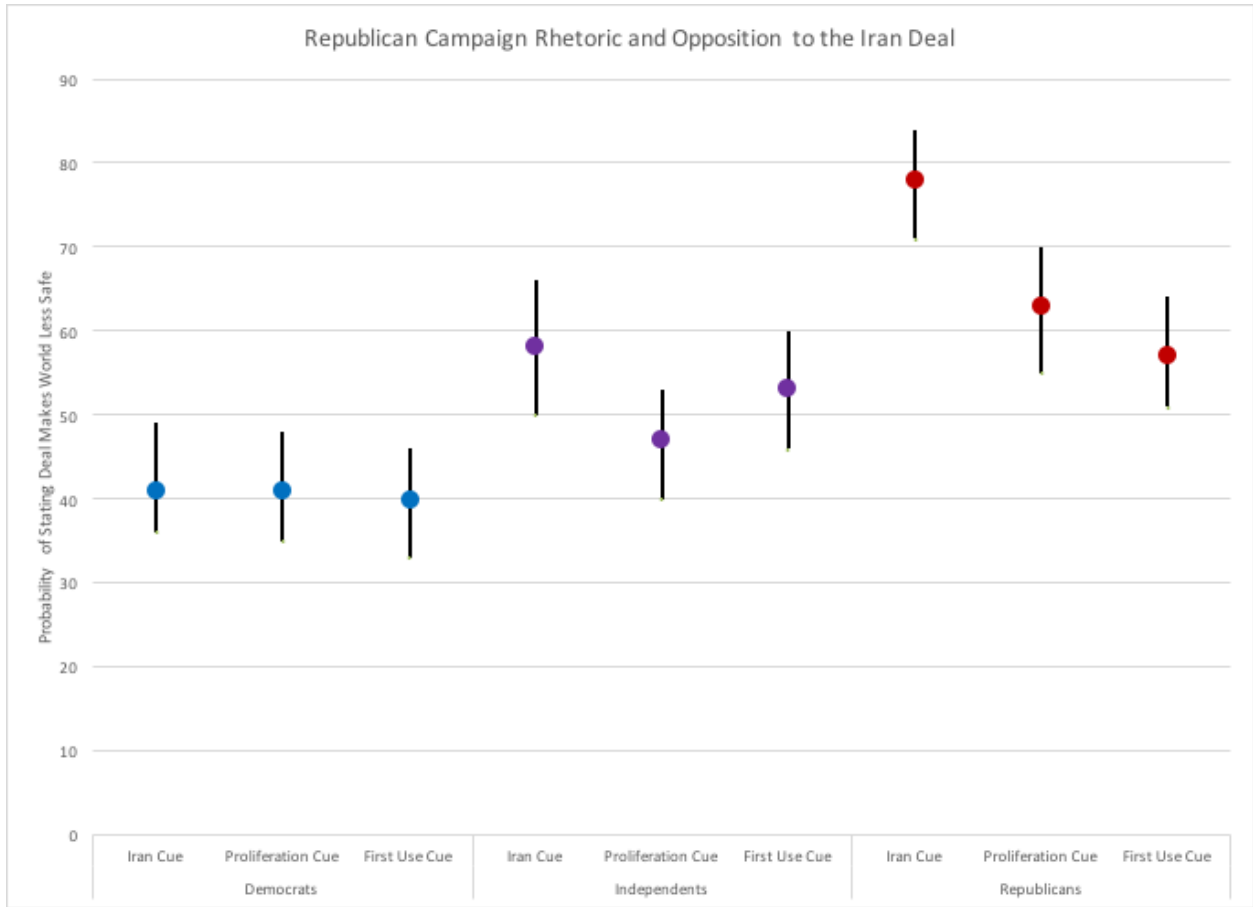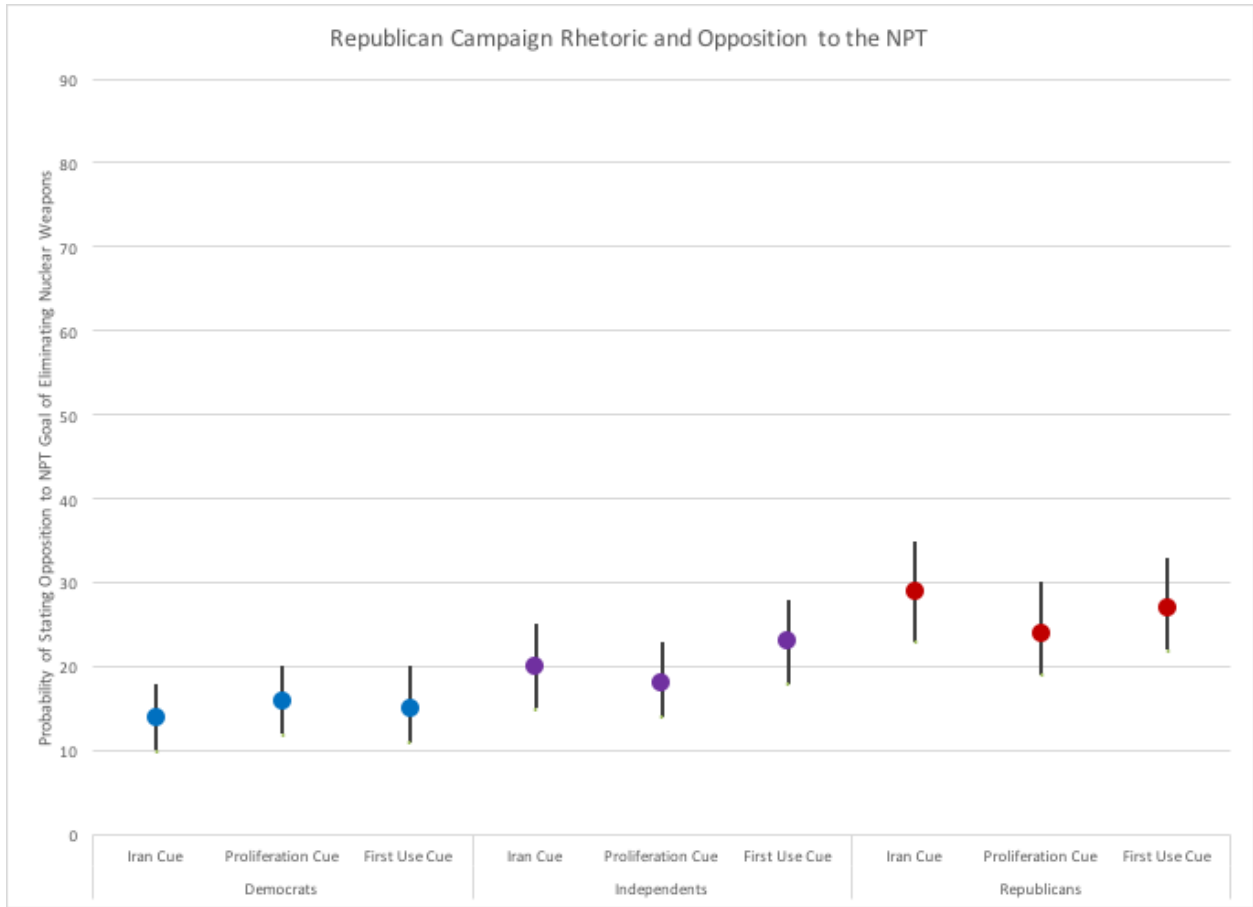Figure 1: Experimental Design

Figure 2

Figure 3

Republican Campaign Rhetoric and Opposition to the Iran Deal

Figure 4

Republican Campaign Rhetoric and Opposition to the NPT

Y-axis: Probability of Stating Opposition to NPT Goal of Eliminating Nuclear Weapons

	Iran Cue	Proliferation Cue	First Use Cue	Iran Cue	Proliferation Cue	First Use Cue	Iran Cue	Proliferation Cue	First Use Cue
	Democrats			Independents			Republicans		

Figure 5

Republican Campaign Rhetoric and the Perceived Importance of Non-Proliferation

Figure 6

Republican Campaign Rhetoric and Support for Nuclear First Use

Figure 7

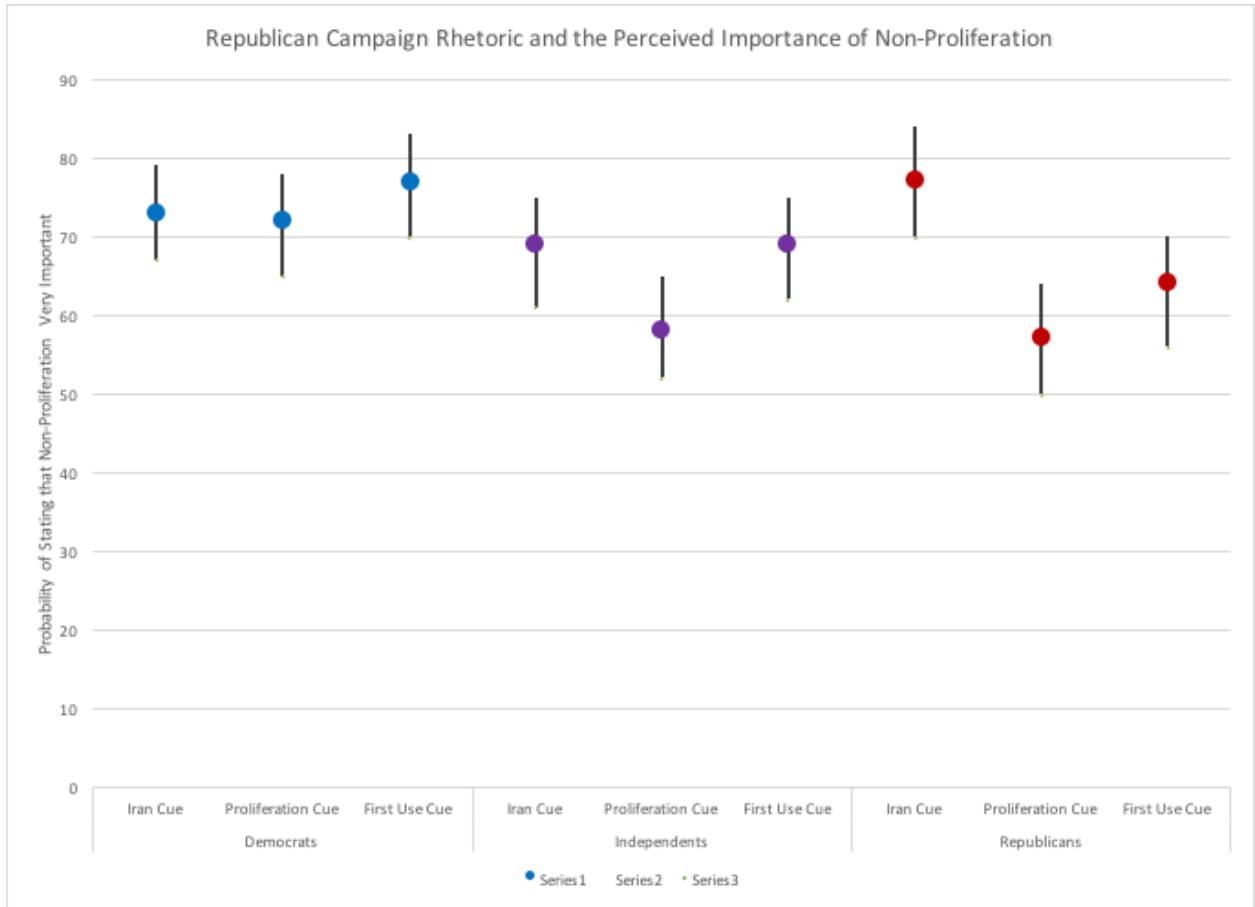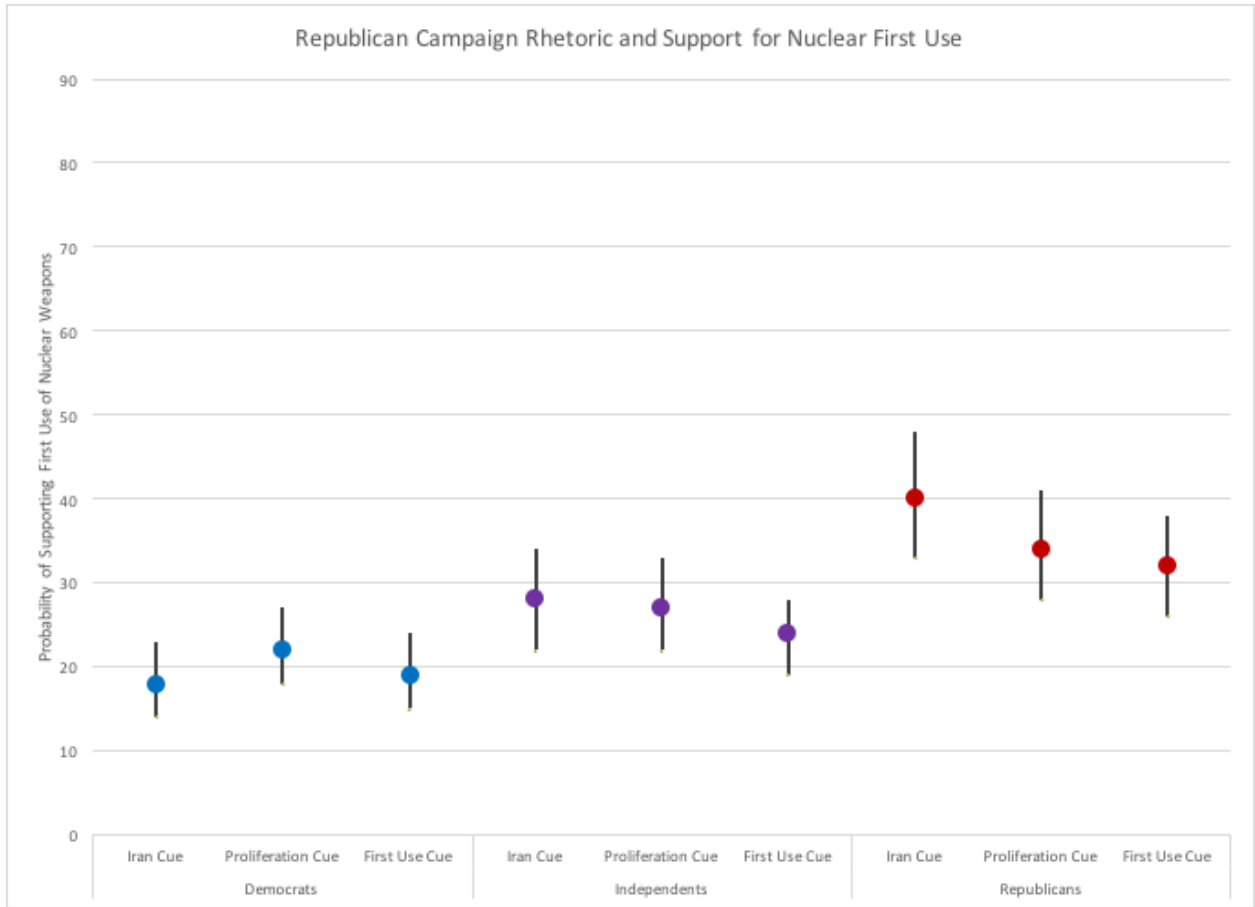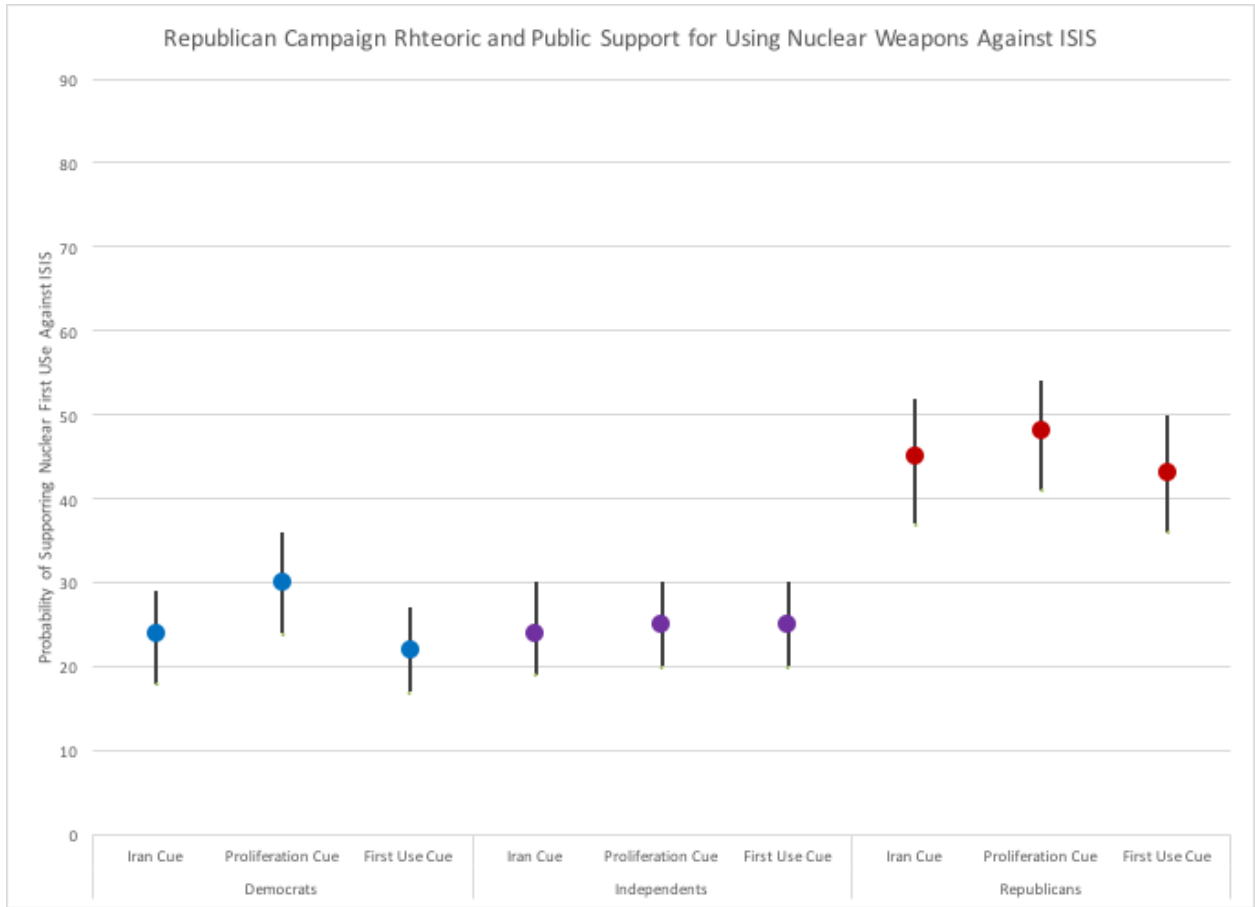Republican Campaign Rhteoric and Public Support for Using Nuclear Weapons Against ISIS

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