Realism, Idealism, and American Public Opinion on Nuclear Disarmament
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**Summary**
Under what conditions do mass publics support disarmament?
- Public support for disarmament has often been assumed rather than examined
- We examine the determinants of support for disarmament using two original survey experiments, and text analysis techniques to examine the reasons underlying support/opposition to disarmament
- Support for disarmament underpinned by idealistic thinking, but many of the concerns that realists have identified as barriers to disarmament (verification, reversability, etc) also reduce support for disarmament
- Independent voters particularly sensitive to realist concerns about verification, reversability, rogue states. The most politically important voters are those for whom support for disarmament is the most sensitive

**Methodology**
- Two survey experiments conducted on national samples of U.S. population
  - Survey Sampling International (SSI) sample (1100 respondents)
  - Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) sample (809 respondents)
- Provide a neutral description of a hypothetical future disarmament scenario, randomly altering key dimensions of the scenario.
  - “Imagine that at some point in the future the U.S. government has proposed an ambitious plan for nuclear disarmament. Under the proposed plan, each nuclear-weapon state will commit to...”
- Examine average levels of support under the various treatment and control conditions
- Use new text analysis techniques to examine ideas underpinning support for disarmament

**Experimental Treatments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verifiability</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of disarmament</td>
<td>100% disarmament</td>
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<tr>
<td>80% disarmament</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reversability</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nuclear “rogue states”</td>
<td>Have nuclear weapons</td>
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<tr>
<td>No longer have nuclear weapons</td>
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**Ideas Underpinning Disarmament**
- Structural topic model “uncovers” realist and idealist topics in survey responses—both are widespread in American public thinking on disarmament and affect support for disarmament
- Example of idealist thinking: “we need [a] clean enviroment and free world with no mass destruction weapons”
- Example of realist thinking: “I don’t want the US to be without nuclear weapons because we would be unprotected from attack in case our intelligence is wrong about other nations being disarmed”
- Idealist language is associated with support for disarmament; realist language associated with opposition

**Verification, Reversability & Scope**
Difficulty of verification and ease of reversability both reduce support for disarmament. Whether the proposal is for full or deep disarmament does not significantly affect support for disarmament

**“Rogue States” With Nuclear Weapons**
North Korea and Iran having nuclear weapons at the time of the proposal reduces support for disarmament by around 8 percentage points

**Independent Voters**
Independent voters are substantially more sensitive to realist concerns than partisans. The most politically important voters are those for whom support for disarmament is the most sensitive

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