

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

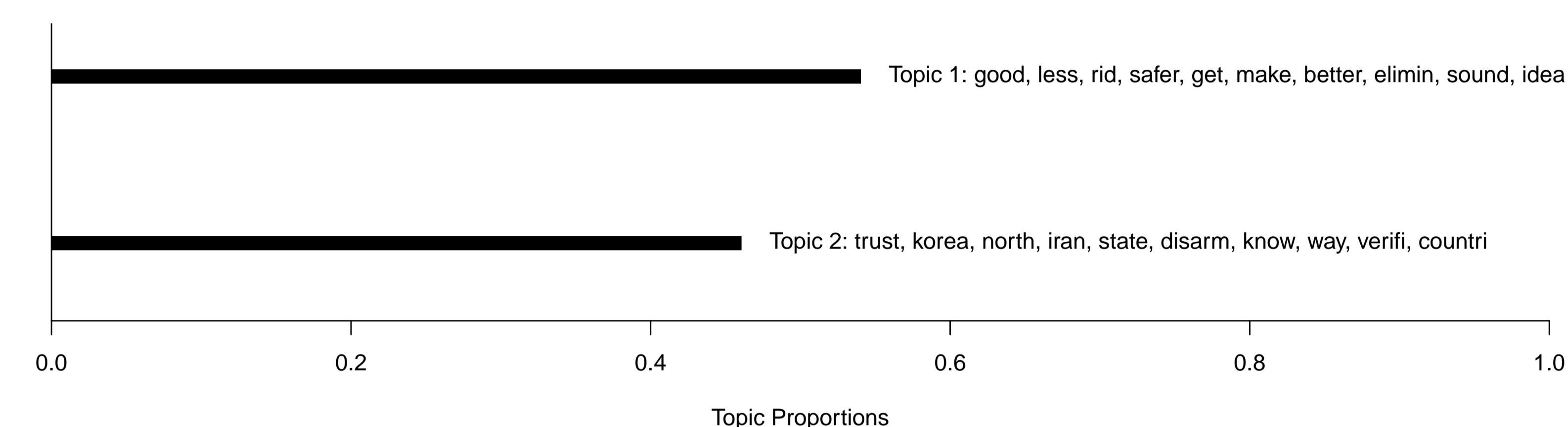
- Two survey experiments conducted on national samples of U.S. population
 - Survey Sampling International (SSI) sample (1100 respondents)
 - Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) sample (809 respondents)
- Provide a neutral description of a hypothetical future disarmament scenario, randomly altering key dimensions 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

Variable	Treatments
Verifiability	Easy Difficult
Degree of disarmament	100% disarmament 80% disarmament
Reversability	Easy Difficult
Nuclear "rogue states"	Have nuclear weapons No longer have nuclear weapons

IDEAS UNDERPINNING DISARMAMENT

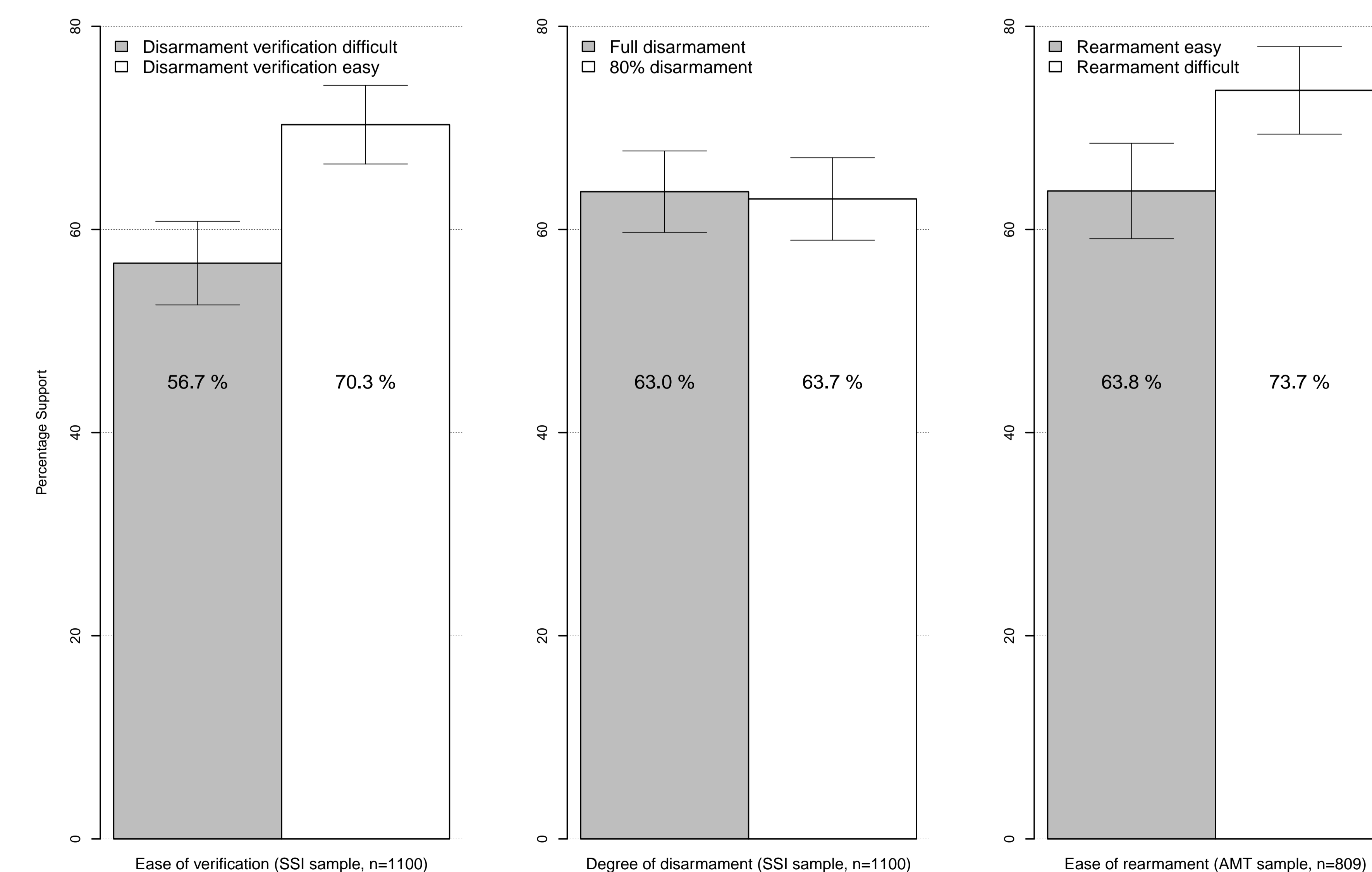
- Structural topic model "uncovers" realist and idealist topics in survey responses—both are widespread in American public thinking on disarmament and affect support for disarmament



- 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.

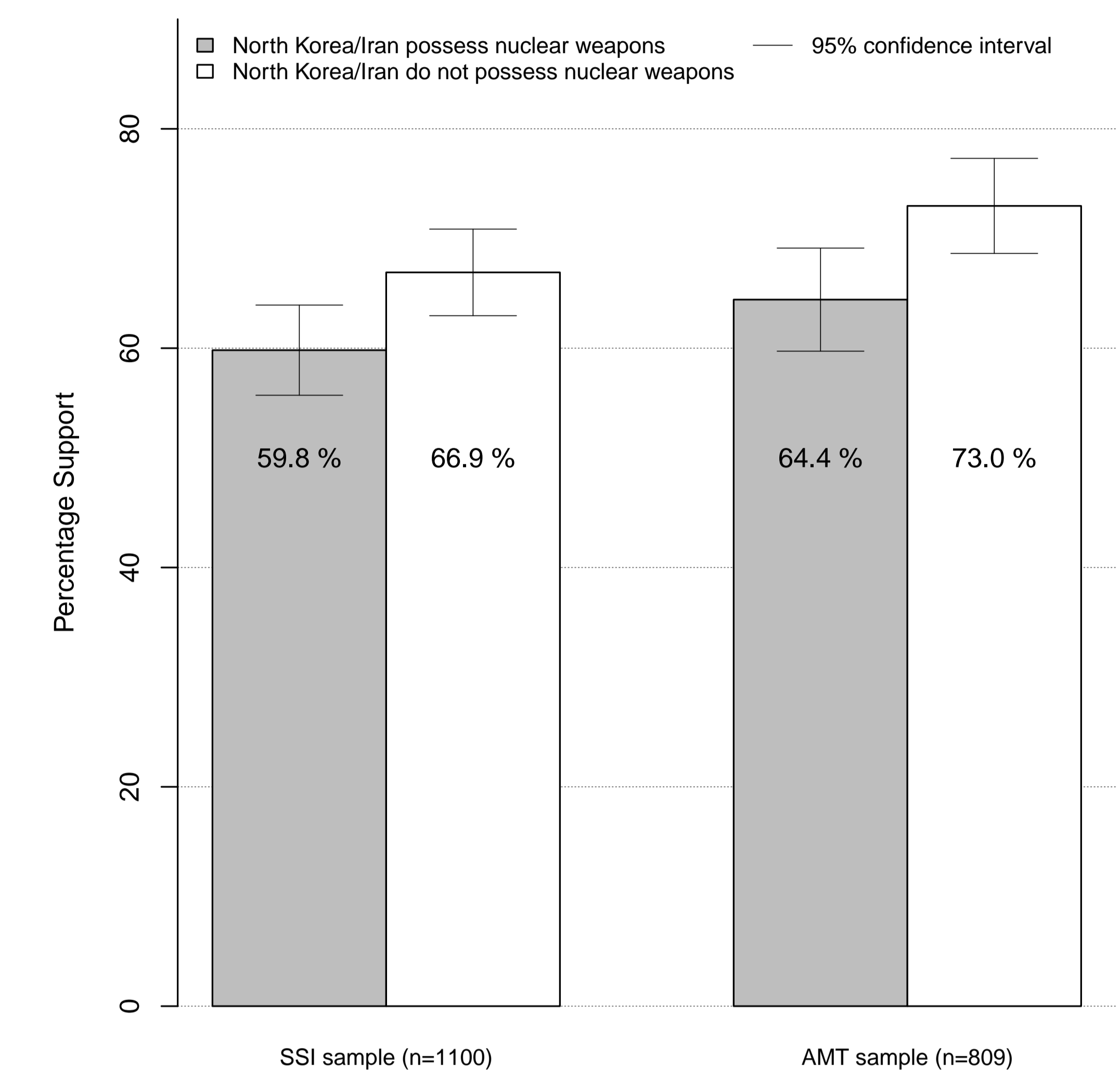
VERIFICATION, REVERSABILITY & SCOPE

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

