

ISRAELI PUBLIC OPINION ON THE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: LESSONS FROM TERROR MANAGEMENT THEORY

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Abstract¹

Under which circumstances do people support the first strike of a nuclear weapon? My work explores a distinct causal mechanism that can explain support for the use of force and more specifically nuclear weapons. The extant interdisciplinary literature suggests that Moral Foundations Theory, including deference to authority and in-group loyalty (Smetana and Vranka 2020) can explain why people are willing to violate the nuclear non-use norm. I add to this newer scholarship by exploring a case other than the United States and arguing for an additional psychological aspect that impacts individual's attitudes. Employing an original survey experiment with the Israeli adult population (N=1022), my research builds on the Terror Management Theory to develop an explanation of some people do not adhere to the norm. I suggest that respondents reminded of their mortality are more likely to support nuclear weapons than those that are not. Broadly speaking, people who are more routinely facing an existential threat will support greater use of nuclear weapons. In an age of populism characterized by the rise of nationalist leaders with authoritarian tendencies, this finding is a source of significant concern.

Key Words

Nuclear Taboo, Nuclear Weapons, Experimental Survey, Israel, Terror Management Theory

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Introduction

“I wish it [the atomic bomb] would never be used,” “I think nuclear weapons are a last resort,” and “the consequences of such a bombing are too extensive and unacceptable. There's no choice but to find another solution.”² These are sentiments expressed by three respondents in the survey I conducted among the Israelis. Yet, the same three respondents also supported a nuclear first strike in a threat scenario. What is it that causes individuals to abandon their explicit opposition to the use of nuclear weapons and support nuclear strikes? This chapter explores why some are willing to support the first use of a nuclear weapon. An original survey experiment builds on recent scholarship by exploring why this nuclear norm is fragile. Through the use terror management theory (TMT) this article explores why some people are more hawkish than others and may support nuclear weapons. TMT suggests that humans are uniquely self-conscious about the inevitability of death and therefore subscribe to permanence and stability in their conceptions of the universe. By using TMT, people are reminded of their finite existence which stimulates existential terror, while their faith in their worldview based on stability mitigates the fear of death. Existential terror influences and simultaneously increases respondents' support of nuclear weapons.

With the exception of a few articles, most recent studies propose a utilitarian logic that suggests that strategic merit and logic of consequences are isolated predictors of the support for nuclear weapons, ignoring basic affective instincts such as survival. The first and second wave of the nuclear taboo literature bring forward consequentialist and categorical logics from which the public derives its opinion. These camps consider the field of international relations in isolation,

² Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at [X](#). The Hebrew version is available upon request.

however. This paper joins a third wave that considers an interdisciplinary approach and suggests that psychological factors are critical for in non-use research. The main finding suggests that the fear of death makes people less risk averse and increases the consideration of the usage of extreme weapons has wide-ranging implications. It is a rather disturbing finding, especially in times when the Middle East sees (1) authoritarian and populist tides, (2) nuclear arms control being largely on hold, and (3) great power competition leading to renewed regional rifts. An understanding of the publics' support for the possibility of nuclear weapons use is necessary. Overall, this research advances a current understanding of why nuclear weapons disarmament, elimination, and non-proliferation is deeply challenging. If the majority of the electorate is reminded of their mortality and in turn supports aggressive military policy, a hawkish leader might be more intrigued to take such action with public support. Further, if people's anxieties make them supportive of nuclear weapons use, we need to ask ourselves how one can prevent and address this angst? If we want to continue a 75-year-old tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons, we need to understand public opinion on these weapons.

The paper proceeds in six parts. The first section provides a brief overview of public opinion on the use of nuclear weapons. The second section introduces the theoretical TMT framework and its derived hypothesis. Thereafter, I outline the research design of the survey experiment. I then present the results, suggesting that mortality salience is a distinct causal mechanism that can explain support for the use of nuclear weapons. The final two sections discuss the policy implications of my findings fifth and make recommendations for future scholarship.

Public Attitude Towards (Non-) Use of Nuclear Weapons

The non-use of nuclear weapons since 1945 remains a central topic of inquiry in political science. The earlier wave of scholarship suggests that this non-use can be explained by a norm-based prohibition, the nuclear taboo (Tannenwald 1999) or tradition of non-use (Paul 2010).³ Recent studies involving anonymous online experimental surveys cast doubt about the robustness of the nuclear taboo and non-use norm. They assert that publics are not as averse to nuclear weapons as found by regular polls (Press, Sagan, and Valentino 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017; Sagan, Dill, and Valentino 2018). For example, the U.S. public's willingness to use nuclear weapons and kill foreign civilians has not changed much since the use of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 (Sagan and Valentino 2017). Even after respondents were primed with the ethics of targeting civilians, still 46% preferred a nuclear strike (Sagan et al. 2020, 173).

The Sagan-Valentino landmark work generated a new round of survey experiments on the use of nuclear weapons, broadly confirming the weakness of the norm against the nuclear weapons (Sang Kim 2019; Smetana and Vranka 2020; Post and Sechser 2017; Rathbun and Stein 2020; Koch and Wells 2020; Sukin 2020; Haworth, Sagan, and Valentino 2019). Challengers to this camp however suggest that respondents indeed adhere to international norms such as the nuclear taboo (Carpenter and Montgomery 2020) and that there is still an aversion but it is conditional on the presence of cues from elites, social networks, and the political discourse (Post and Sechser 2017, 12). Carpenter and Montgomery took issue with Sagan and Valentino's survey design, arguing that they omitted a mentioning of the illegality of the use of force and

³ For a comprehensive discussion of the early nuclear taboo literature, see (Smetana et al. 2021).

provided only positive cues in a scenario, eliciting biased framing effects.⁴ Similarly, Press, Sagan, and Valentino present respondents with cues only *in favor* of using nuclear weapons and lack a control group that did not receive any treatment. A researcher cannot know which treatment frame (or both) shapes attitudes if one compares only the two treatment conditions to each other instead of to a control group (Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007, 8-9). Another methodological flaw appears in Post and Sechser's study that presents respondents with a dichotomy between support and non-support for a nuclear strike and no option to *neither agree nor disagree with a strike*, forcing a response (2017, 18-19).

A recent review of the mentioned non-use scholarship termed a the *second wave* of taboo scholars (Smetana et al. 2021). While the first, constructivist wave had focused on qualitative analyses of elite decision-making, this camp used large-N quantitative methods, particularly survey experiments, to explore public attitudes. There is little doubt about how much elite views matter, but the scholarship also provides evidence on the importance of public opinion on foreign policy.⁵ Tannenwald even argues that public opinion has been a critical factor constraining the use of nuclear weapons by U.S. leaders (2007). The existing dimensions however remain undertheorized in both waves. The second wave does not adequately explore the psychological causal mechanisms that explain why people have supported the use of nuclear weapons irrespective of the taboo. Instead, it proposes a utilitarian logic that suggests that the strategic

⁴ Carpenter and Montgomery also challenge Sagan and Valentino regarding the civilian immunity norm (2020, 154). My work does not test the robustness of this norm but focuses on the non-use norm by providing a hypothetical scenario to respondents that excludes casualty measures.

⁵ For recent, comprehensive reviews of this discussion see (Gelpi 2017; Kertzer and Zeitsoff 2017; Milner and Tingley 2015).

merit of a nuclear strike are isolated predictors of the support for nuclear weapons. This however ignores basic affective instincts such as the need for security and survival.

Regarding the limitations of the second wave, the same scholars propose an agenda for a necessary third wave of nuclear taboo research (Smetana et al. 2021). Smetana and Vranka are among the first scholars to consider psychological factors in non-use research (2020). Their Moral Foundations Theory as explanation for approval of nuclear strikes suggests that those scoring high on binding moral values are more likely to approve a nuclear strike than those scoring high on individualizing moral values. Binding moral values are loyalty, respect for authority, and sanctity while individualizing moral values are caring and fairness. Individualizing moral values are care and fairness. Another psychological study of moral concerns confirmed that retribution, deference to authority, and in-group loyalty are associated with support for the use of nuclear weapons (Rathbun and Stein 2020).

The findings in this chapter suggests that many individuals are willing to eschew the norm against the use of nuclear weapons in a first strike when feel threatened. Given the state-of-the-art on the topic, it makes three contributions to the nuclear taboo research. First, the “nuclear indifference” school– as Post and Sechser term it – and second wave did not explore the micro foundations of public opinion. Instead of simply asking why individuals might support the use of nuclear weapons, this work joins the third wave of research and provides novel information on the effects of a specific causal mechanism, highlighting the impact of one specific factor on the dependent variable. This *effect of causes* (EoC) approach (Smith 2014) estimates the average effects of one factor, here mortality salience (MS), on the dependent variable, here the support for nuclear weapons use in a first strike, within a population, here Israelis. This is in contrast to the more commonly used *causes of effects* (CoE) approach that makes generalizations

about larger populations by explaining the effect of a causal factor (Gelman and Imbens 2013), answering broad “why” questions. EoC is more suitable for experimental studies and focuses on the impact of single factors. The nuclear taboo research so far has largely explored such reverse causal inference, including many CoEs such as demographics, noncombatant casualty rates, and public discourse that suggests patterns of increased or decreased support for nuclear weapons.

Second, to understand the EoC, this work applies an interdisciplinary approach that introduces a theory that otherwise have not been discussed in connection with the use of nuclear weapons. Just how Smetana and Vranka explore a theory of social psychology, I borrow a theoretical framework from social and evolutionary psychology – TMT – that affects behavioral responses. Testing TMT includes a reminder of people’s finite existence which stimulates existential terror. This explores whether the stimulation increases people’s support for the use of force. Bridging disciplines can provide a better understanding of the psychological aspects in human beings that cause them to increase support of nuclear weapons. Third, I investigate public opinion on the use of nuclear weapons outside the United States, in Israel. With the exception of an experiment in South Korea (Sukin 2020) and a working paper (Sagan, Dill, and Valentino 2018), the existing research studies the American public in isolation. Yet, the geopolitical situation in the Middle East, including Israel’s undeclared nuclear arsenal and Iran’s controversial nuclear developments, make such questions very salient and relevant. Sagan, Dill and Valentino survey the Israeli public and find that they are the most hawkish compared to the British, French, and U.S. public. However, the authors focus again on utilitarian logic, that citizens prioritize the effects of a military operation for the preservation of human life and sparing compatriot over foreign civilians, rather than basic, psychological instincts.

Theoretical Framework: Terror Management Theory

What causal mechanism can explain support for the use of extreme force and specifically nuclear weapons? Having a favorable attitude toward these weapons contradicts moral rules as it would not only conflict harm to other's welfare (Ben-Nun Bloom 2014) but these weapons are inherently indiscriminate, largely uncontrollable, and instruments of mass destruction on an unparalleled scale in human history with radiation effects that persist for generations after their detonation. However, individuals violate their moral standards under certain conditions and justifications. TMT (Greenberg et al. 1997) provides one of such explanatory frameworks. The theory suggests that humans -along with animals- are uniquely self-conscious about the inevitability of death. Humans know that they will die and there is nothing they can do to prevent that. Usually, that thought of the inevitable death is pushed to the unconsciousness. The increased awareness of mortality creates paralyzing existential terror: "the emotional manifestation of the self-preservation instinct in an animal intelligent enough to know that it will someday die (quoted in Gordon and Arian 2001, 208)." To avoid such terror, humans subscribe to order, permanence, and stability in their conceptions of the universe, or world views. Reminding people of their finite existence, termed mortality salience (MS), stimulates the existential terror, while their faith in their worldview based on stability mitigates the fear of death. This is termed a *cultural anxiety-buffer* (Greenberg et al. 1992, 212). It is anticipated that this buffer is removed when people are reminded of their mortality. Following this removal, people's willingness to use nuclear weapons is tested.

Survey experiments that use TMT usually remind their subjects of their own death and are asked to describe their feelings (Ullrich and Cohrs 2007). The primes to remind someone of his or her own death can be naturally occurring deaths (Jonas et al. 2002) or -for example- deadly

car accidents (Nelson et al. 1997). Table 1 summarizes relevant studies of previous behavioral responses in response to MS inductions and shows how this work fits in.⁶ If respondents perceive high MS, their support for one's own country and culture is elevated and more parochial positions. This has enabled TMT to explain why peace efforts in the context of war and violence are hampered. This fear of death however is something that one cannot fully cope with or comprehend. It triggers a distal death defense that reside beneath the consciousness (Greenberg et al. 2000).

Table 1: Induction of Mortality Salience and Behavioral Responses

IV (Conflict, Event, Value)	Induction	Behavioral Response/ Societal Reaction
Disengagement Plan (Hirschberger and Ein-Dor 2006)	Mortality Salience	Greater support for violent resistance against disengagement plan
Allegiance to Leader (Landau et al. 2004; Cohen et al. 2005)		Increased support for U.S. President G.W. Bush
Motivation for Military Service (Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler 2009)		Higher level of motivation to join military
Military Might (Pyszczynski et al. 2006)		Support from conservative students for military interventions
Cultural Worldview and Values (Greenberg et al. 1990; Rosenblatt et al. 1989)		Positive evaluation of in-group member, negative evaluation of outgroup member
Adherence to Nuclear Non-Use Norm		Increased support for the use of nuclear weapons in a first strike

To this date, TMT has seen a limited application to explore the extent of the public's support for extreme use of force and specifically the use of nuclear weapons. In most previous studies, respondents who were primed about the utility of nuclear weapons were merely asked

⁶ For a comprehensive summary and analysis of scholarly articles that used TMT, see (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 2010).

about their willingness to support the use of nuclear weapons. Scholar have mostly prioritized the utilitarian logic to argue that people will use weapons when it has strategic benefits, such as saving the lives of U.S. soldiers (Sagan and Valentino 2017) or destroying a bunker killing terrorist leaders inside (Post and Sechser 2017). However, there is not just a utilitarian, logical, or rational argument to be made but also one that is informed by much more basic affective instincts, especially for Israelis.

Israel is a country where an attack by a hostile powerful country such as Iran can have life-and-death implications for large segments of the society. Hence, a security threat in Israel is frequently linked to the perception of an existential threat. This work tests existing conceptualization of survival instincts through a reminder of death, MS. When respondents are stimulated by existential terror, the inevitable death is pushed to the consciousness and triggers a defense for one's survival that can require the use of force. The TMT literature suggests that individuals care little about the effect of a probable defense mechanism. The importance of the consequences of protection decreases its significance as long as survival can be ensured. Nuclear weapons ensure a defense in a most effective way. The concern of the effect of a defense decreases as long as security and survival are ensured. When respondents feel threatened and concerned over their lives, they are looking for a fast, effective way to defend themselves. A nuclear strike at that moment seemingly offers an effective solution.

H1: In a comparison of Israeli respondents, those being reminded of their death are more likely to support the use of nuclear weapons than those that are not.

Case Selection

To test the hypothesis, Israel is a particularly suitable case study for the analysis of public opinion on the use of force because respondents' daily lives are directly impacted by foreign

policy which suggests a well-informed public on issues of foreign policy. As Iranian nuclear proliferation efforts and Israeli Iranian tensions continue to play an important role, the Israeli public's opinion on the use of force can quickly gain importance. Israel's nuclear ambiguity and Iran's controversial nuclear developments make such questions about the use of nuclear weapons very salient and relevant. Yet this topic has been understudied. Foreign policy issues play a crucial role for Israelis. The Israeli elections (with historically high voter turnout) emphasize that the electorate votes on foreign policy issues (Hermann and Yuchtman-Yaar 2002, 598) and considers policies on national security a key voting issue (Shamir and Arian 1999). Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo surveyed the Israeli (and US) public to highlight the large extent of which foreign policy matters when citizens vote for parties and candidates (2018).

Secondly, there have been few recent academic studies that asked Israelis about their opinion on the use of nuclear weapons (e.g., Sagan, Dill, and Valentino 2018). Only a few numbers about Israeli support for a nuclear strike are available through public opinion polls. In 1986, 36%, 1987, 53%, 1988, 52%, 1991, 88%, and 1993, 67% Israeli Jews said the use was justified 'under certain circumstances.' However, these polls have been conducted over twenty years ago, tell little about the current stage of public attitude in the country, and fail to speak on the causal mechanism of support. Lastly, Israel's universal conscription makes questions about the use of force more salient (Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018). Hence, "Israeli citizens should be more likely to be accessing actual beliefs about the use of force in foreign policy (rather than constructing belief systems "on the fly") as well as paying closer attention to [a] experimental vignette (increasing the validity of their responses) (2018)."

Experimental Design

Survey experiments are increasingly used in political science to study consequences of foreign policy decisions (Chaudoin 2014; Johns and Davies 2014; Kertzer and Brutger 2016; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Trager and Vavreck 2011). Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo's do not only provide clarification to the enduring debate on the effect of public opinion on foreign policy, but also highlight the benefits of experimental approaches to the study of public opinion (2018, 7-9). Research in the social sciences has increasingly applied and benefitted from experimental methods to obtain truthful responses on socially undesirable preferences or behaviors. Experiments have been effectively employed to understand sensitive issues and their causal explanations such as support for militant groups and combatants (Bullock, Imai, and Shapiro 2011; Lyall, Graeme, and Imai 2013) and attitudes towards war, torture, and detention (Gartner 2008; Wallace 2013; Piazza 2015). Attitudes toward nuclear weapons fall under this category of sensitive topics. This work joins the experimental approaches of the second and third wave of the nuclear taboo literature to explore the causal factors influencing why some individuals are more willing to subscribe to taboos than others. It proposes a combination of traditional survey questions with an experiment. The random assignment of respondents into different groups provides causal inference of attitude towards nuclear weapons. Such a design allows a quantification of the uncertainty associated with the confirmation of the effects of the different treatments (Imbens 2010, 407). The strength of experimental methods is the determination of the effect on a given outcome of a particular causal treatment (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2015, 302), giving insights into internal rather than external validity.

The survey design employs a structured data collection.⁷ Respondents are first being asked demographic and baseline questions about nuclear weapons. Then they are faced with the treatments and follow-up questions. Finally, two questions serve as manipulation checks to test respondent's attentiveness to the article and treatments. The test conditions of the experiment include two different primers based on TMT and one primer based on a realistic threat scenario. Table 2 summarizes the sequences and 2x2 layout design of the experiment. Overall, there are 4 groups: T1 MS-CW; T1 MS-NW; CG-CW; and CG NW.⁸

Table 2: Sequence and Layout of the Experiment

1	2	3	4	5
Demographic Variables	Treatment	News Article	Dependent Variable	Manipulation Checks
• Demographics • Party Identification • Religion/Religiosity • Threat Perception	• MS Treatment Group (T1) • Control Group (CG)	Conventional Weapon (CW) Nuclear Weapon (NW)	• Approval of Strike • Morals • Physical Effects • Risk of Retaliation	• Questions on news articles • Nuclear Weapons (Knowledge/Morals)

Standard Questions

all respondents

Treatment 1

T1CG

Dependent Variable

CW NW CW NW

To test TMT, the subjects of the experimental group are reminded of their mortality and then asked questions about their approval of a nuclear strike. The applied treatment is used according to other prominent works that employ TMT. The vignette here does not include a

⁷ The full survey vignette is in Appendix 2 and the codebook in Appendix 3.

⁸ A third group was treated with a reminder of the novel Coronavirus Covid-19 to induce MS. This treatment will be explored in a comparative perspective between the U.S. and Israeli population to test a MS proxy.

natural MS manipulation (car accidents, as terrorist attacks, or funeral home), but simulated induction that is artificially introduced through two common open-ended questions, referred to as Mortality Attitudes Personalities Survey (Rosenblatt et al. 1989) or Projective Life Attitudes Assessment (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1991).⁹ A vast amount of literature has used over 21 different MS manipulations, including explicit, implicit, and naturally occurring death reminders in forms of questionnaires, scales, pictures, film footage, search puzzles, and location-dependency to enforce the treatment (for a detailed list, see Cox, Darrell, and Arrowood 2019, 89-90). However, the open-ended questions have not only been used by Greenberg et al. (1990, 310), and Rosenblatt et al. (1989, 682), but roughly 80% of 277 TMT studies (Cox, Darrell, and Arrowood 2019, 87). The condition asks respondents to briefly describe the emotions that the thought of their own death arouses in them as well as what they think happens to them as they physically die. Both questions induce MS. Respondents are given space to write about their feelings and thoughts about mortality and thus remind themselves that their lives are limited – as they would be if respondents face an immediate threat. Writing tasks are usually employed in lab settings instead of computerized self-administered questionnaires (CSAQs). Hence, there might be short answers to the question or none at all. Regardless of the length of the answer, respondents are still incentivized to think about their death. The control group is primed with the

⁹ The pilot study with 114 undergraduate students from the University of Central Florida used the Collett-Lester Fear of Death Scale Version 3 as MS induction (Lester and Abdel-Khalek 2003; Lester 1990; Boyar 1964), which is also widely acknowledged and used by scholars in the field (for example Rosenblatt et al. 1989, 682-683). The newest version of the scale consists of 14 statements about ones' own death (for example *how it will feel to be dead* and *never thinking or experiencing anything again*). However, the results of my student survey created some concerns about the attention span of the respondents. Several individuals responded with the same answer for each item.

same two open-ended questions but pertained to *food* and *eating* – a common treatment for controls (see for example Rosenblatt et al. 1989).

Immediately following the treatment, all respondents face a distraction in form of a commonly used word puzzle.¹⁰ TMT studies include this delay and distraction between the prime and measure to allow for the mortality reminder to fade from consciousness. This is in line with the theory's argument that the distant death defenses appear only when the thought of death remains in the unconsciousness (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon 1999).¹¹ Treatments will only work if they trigger such defenses. Removing this distraction results in the disappearance of the effects of MS on the dependent measures (i.e. Greenberg et al. 2000). The next component – a newspaper article (Appendix 2)- poses a hypothetical, but realistic conflict scenario between Iran and Israel. The two countries have been longtime rivals and have an antagonistic relationship (for historical summaries, see for example Kaye, Nader, and Roshan 2011; Katz and Hendel 2012). Hence, any further Iranian nuclear program developments (in particular uranium enrichment) puts the public and Israeli military on alert. If Iran further violates IAEA enriched uranium provisions,¹² the newspaper headline “Iran Now Capable of Targeting Israel with Nuclear Weapon” is moving closer to reality. So would Israel's response as the government has not pledged to a *no first use* policy but follows the ambiguous doctrines (1) that Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East and (2) that the country will use

¹⁰ For reference, please see TMT Web site (www.tmt.missouri.edu) that lists all known TMT studies and provides two templates of delay questions commonly used. I thank Dr. Jamie Arndt (University of Missouri) and Dr. Mark Landau (University of Kansas) for their advice with this.

¹¹ For a more in-depth discussion of the distal defenses and the anxiety-buffering system specific by TMT, see (Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg 2015).

¹² For most recent violations, see <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/iaea-and-iran-iaea-reports>.

counterproliferation to prevent enemies' development of weapons of mass destruction (*Begin Doctrine*).

Recent scholarship has criticized such fictional scenarios for causing a wrong understanding among respondents on international legal norms, omitting reminders of the law, and priming individuals with war crimes (Carpenter, Montgomery, and Nylen 2020).¹³ However, it is unfeasible to include all information without making surveys too long and complex without the risk of losing respondents or their attentiveness.¹⁴ Experiments and EoC approaches generally remain vulnerable to claims of having omitted certain considerations such as a reminder of legal implications of a particular scenario. Yet many decisions are made only after a number of independent variables come into play and interplay with each other. Experimental scenarios are useful to explore when individuals uphold their principles or when they conflict. As Sagan and Valentino point out, it is easy for people to voice support for abstract normative principle (2020, 175) such as asking respondents whether the use of nuclear weapons is morally wrong. In this survey, the mean of all responses to such the question of mortality is 2.6 (Likert scale with 0 being highly unethical, 7 being highly ethical), pointing to a moral principle against the use of nuclear weapons. Noticeably, this mirrors the findings of regular polls. However, the potential use of a nuclear weapons in the real world puts the public before a much more complex scenario, mirrored as in this work, too. Unlike Sagan and Valentino's survey experiment,¹⁵

¹³ For a note on the ethics of this study, see Appendix 6.

¹⁴ This work however agrees that a debriefing can inform the participants that these kinds of acts may be a violation of international law and potentially a war crime, granted that individuals will take the time to read it. It should be included in future studies.

¹⁵ Sagan and Valentino's question read: "Given the facts described in the article, if you had to choose between launching the strike against the Iranian city or continuing the ground war against Iran, which option would you prefer?" 1-6 (Strongly Prefer to Continue Ground War to Strongly Prefer to Launch Strike)

Israeli respondents here are not asked to choose between military actions in order to avoid a framing effect criticized by Carpenter, Montgomery, and Nylen (2020). Instead, respondents are giving the option to disapprove of the strike. The question reads:

Given the facts described in the article, if Israel decides to strike, how much would you approve or disapprove of this decision?

- ☐ Strongly Approve (5)
- ☐ Somewhat Approve (4)
- ☐ Neither Approve nor Disapprove (3)
- ☐ Somewhat Disapprove (2)
- ☐ Strongly Disapprove (1)

All facts in the articles were held constant for all groups to isolate the effect of the causal variable in the primer. To avoid a biased framing effect, there are no elite cues such as the head of government recommending a strike in the article.

The target population for this work is the Israeli adult population (> 18 years), comprised of approximate 6,394,030 million.¹⁶ Under my supervision, an Israeli polling firm Midgam managed the data collection and recruited a nationally representative sample of Jews and Arabs,¹⁷ sampling all groups to paint a convincing portrait and correct for the limitations of previous surveys. 7,307 questionnaires were ordered for Israelis Jews, 1,257 Israelis started the survey and 1,026 finished properly,¹⁸ resulting in a response rate of 21.10%. The response rate for Arabs was lower at 12.62% with 1,553 ordered questionnaires and 121 respondents properly finishing the survey. The final survey includes 335 in T1 and 339 in the CG. The firm was tasked to recruit a random sample of Israelis ages 18 and older, considering sex, age, and residential

¹⁶ The complete Jewish population is 6,697,000 million (74.6% of the total population), 1,890,000 millions are Arabs (20.9%), and 434,000 are others (4.5%).

¹⁷ Israeli Arabs are intentionally included as they are a widely neglected group in polls and experimental surveys. Another work explores these demographics with more depth.

¹⁸ For comparison, the sample size mean in 277 experiments (pre 2010) that use TMT is 87.3, ranging from 17 to 343 participants (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 2010, 177).

area. Randomization checks concluded that the independent variable, MS, did not predict allocation of specific treatments. None of the demographic groups were neither significantly more or less likely to receive the treatment nor differed in systematic ways. The Jewish sample is representative in terms of gender and age with corresponding quotas from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics. The Arab sample however diverges from the general Arab population in order to recruit enough respondents. Respondents were recruited by organic and sponsored referrals in search engines (mostly Google).¹⁹ A number of sites (i.e. Facebook and Telegram) referred internet surfers to the panel and finally the participants themselves refer other people and receive compensation for this as part of the site's affiliate program. The representativeness of the required sample was maintained by the fact that participants did not enter the studies freely but were invited to partake further if they meet the demographic characteristics of the quotas in accordance with the study's requirements. This non-probability sampling technique is termed *quota sampling*, whereas the accumulated sample has the same proportions of individuals as the targeted population with respect to known characteristics that should meet this research's quota criteria.

Midgam's sampling error is 4.4. The sampling frame consists of individuals with internet access enrolled in an administered online panel. The method to conduct the survey was the CSAQ.²⁰ Investigations have shown that online platforms to recruit subjects are valid tools for experimental research in political science and that respondents are at times even more

¹⁹ Midgam's records indicate that respondents were paid 4 Israeli New Shekel (± 1.17 USD).

²⁰ A telephone survey was not conducted because research has shown that specifically in Israel they lead to systematic underrepresentation of people with a lower socioeconomic status, non-veteran immigrants, individuals in the 30-44 age and other subpopulations in Israel (Gordoni, Oren, and Shavit 2011). In addition, social desirability bias is more likely in people responses. Other methods such as the Socially Mediated Internet Survey method (Cassese et al. 2013) is not used because it is not representative of the general adult population of a country.

representative of an adult population than in-person surveying (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). The CSAQ has several advantages for this research. A computerized algorithm assures that all respondents have an equal chance of being assigned the different treatments. Such randomization gives credibility to the survey and is the strength of the study design (Imbens 2010, 407). CSAQs also prevents the interference of spillover (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2015, 326-27). The respondents of both T1 and CG were fully separated and did not share any interaction with each other. Respondents of the CG are highly unlikely to have been treated by accident and the independence of treatment and control thus was ensured. Further, conducting the survey online reduced the social disability bias²¹ (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000), annulled potential for any interviewer biases, and was most fitting for the nature of the treatments (i.e. open-ended questions, word puzzle).

A concern of online surveys can be the coverage of population parameters. The elderly might not have or use the internet as frequently. However, this is not an issue in Israel. In 2017, 87% of Israelis used the internet at least occasionally ("Spring 2017 Survey Data" 2017). Among all respondents, 47% used the internet several times a day, 30% once a day, and 12% several times a week to get news. Furthermore, about nine-in-ten (88%) Israelis owned smartphones in 2018 (Taylor and Silver 2019). Older people are also catching up in their smart phone use. Among individuals that are 55 and older, 80% use them in comparison to 91% of individuals

²¹ "The concept of social desirability rests on the notions that there are social norms governing some behaviors and attitudes and that people may misrepresent themselves to appear to comply with these norms (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008)." For example, not voting can be perceived as violation to a civic duty. Respondents tend to overreport voting (Belli, Traugott, and Beckmann 2001) or underreport other undesirable behaviors such as drug use or drinking (Tourangeau and Yan 2007).

between the ages of 18 and 34 years. Table 3 summarizes the basic demographic characteristics of the survey sample compared with that of the general population.

Table 3: Summary Statistics of Demographics of Sample and General Population

Demographic	General Population	Survey Sample
Gender	49.8% male/ 50.2% female	49.7% male/ 50.3% female
Age (Jews only)	18-24 years: 14.9%	18-24 years: 14.6%
	25-54 years: 57.8%	25-54 years: 60.4%
	55-64 years: 15.4%	55-64 years: 14.6%
	65-74 years: 11.7%	65-74 years: 10.5%
Ethnic Groups	74.1% Jews/ 21% Arabs	90.4% Jews/ 9.6% Arabs

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, Midgam

Findings

Overall, the results of the study suggest that 32.8% of all respondents, regardless of their treatment, support a nuclear strike in a plausible threat scenario. Thus, while there is a passionate debate about what numbers can be counted as practical thresholds (Sagan et al. 2020), this work suggests that over half the sample supporting a nuclear attack – in a first strike– neither confirms a strong taboo nor challenges substantial nuclear aversion. Another 15% said they neither agree nor disagree with the strike and over half of the sample (52.3%) opposed it before being conditioned with a security threat. The still fairly high support does not imply a weak nuclear norm across the globe. Israel is an outlier in the sense that the population tends to be more hawkish overall. In fact, a second survey conduct in December 2020 with the U.S. population confirms that there is a norm among the public: a mere 10.2% supported a nuclear first strike.

Figure 1 plots the means and confidence interval bars for both groups. Both groups are associated with higher support for a nuclear strike after the realistic threat scenario. The mean support for the strike in the T1 group before the treatment is 2.54 (N=250) and after 3.5 (N=135) a difference of 1. Support for a nuclear first strike increased at a greater rate in T1 and difference

between both groups is significant. In other words, respondents exposed to TMT are more likely to express support for nuclear strikes than respondents without such exposure. A Wilcoxon signed rank test rejects the null Hypothesis H_0 which states that there is no difference between respondents in T1 before and after the MS treatment and instead reveals a significant difference in support for a nuclear first strike, $n=135$, $Z=-6.4$, $p=0.00$. Figure 2 shows that respondents in both groups find the nuclear strike increasingly moral after a realistic threat scenario. On average, T1 increased its support by 1.2 and the CG by .8.

Figure 1: Approval of Nuclear Strike Before and After Treatments

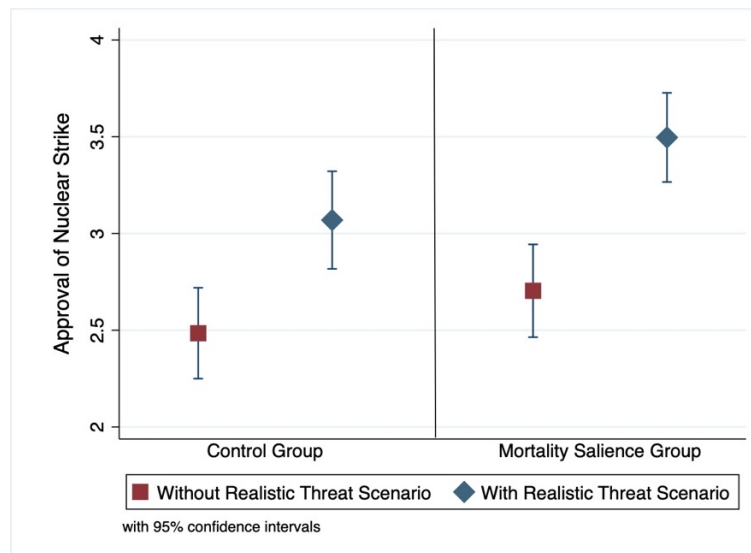


Figure 2: Morality of Nuclear Strike with and without Realistic Threat Scenario

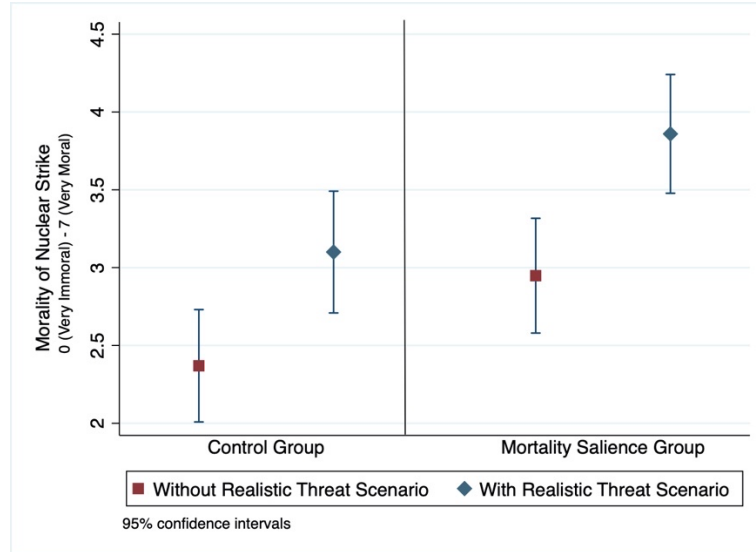


Table 4 displays the result of five ordinal logistic regression models that assess the effects of a reminder of death on the support for a nuclear strike. It models how the independent variable MS predicts the categorial five escalating levels of the strike support. The four models support *H1* and show that respondents that are being reminded of their death are more likely to support the use of nuclear weapons than those that are not. Without accounting for control variables, Model 1 shows a positive effect of mortality salience on support for nuclear weapons ($p=.014$). The estimate of the average effect of MS within Israelis is 0.54. A linear regression showed largely similar results (Appendix 5).

The positive and significant coefficient substantiate the expected relationship between traditional mortality salience and the use of nuclear weapons. Some models control for several standard individual level variables including gender, year of birth,²² geographic location, level of education, political ideology, socio-economic status (SES), threat perception, and nuclear knowledge. In Model 4 where the dependent variable changed, still asking about the approval of a nuclear strike but *with* the likelihood of military retaliations, MS remains a significant predictor

²² For more comments on age and gender, see Appendix 5.

of support at the level of $p < 0.38$. At the same time, education, and age continue to be at the level of $p < 0.05$.

Model 3 and 4 show that political ideology and threat perception are significant driving factors of support. Political conservatives (ordinal variable 0-10) and people that have a higher perception of the current threat level in Israel (ordinal variable 1-7) are more supportive of the use of nuclear weapons than their respective counterparts – as shown by the positive and significant coefficients across the models. Similarly, the Jewish- Arab divide is a significant predictor across the Models 2-4. The estimate of the average effect of nuclear support within Jews ranges from 1.2-2.3 in these models. While a large portion of both groups are supportive of the use of force, Jewish support for nuclear weapons is higher because they tend to have a higher threat perception²³ that likely causes a higher degree of terror in contrast to Arabs.

²³ When asked “How concerned are you about the possibility that Israel will be attacked by an enemy next year?”, the survey suggests a linear relationship between Jews and a higher threat perception ($p = .004$).

Table 4: Logistic Regression of the Effects of Mortality Salience on Israelis' Attitudes Towards the Use of a Nuclear Weapon

VARIABLES ²⁴	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4 (added Threat of Retaliation)
Mortality Salience	.536** (.221)	.526** (.232)	.477** (.239)	.362** (.174)
Gender		-.231 (.234)	-.393 (.244)	-.545*** (.177)
Geography		.006 (.097)	.004 (.101)	-.07 (.074)
Education		-.059 (.076)	-.057 (.079)	-.104* (.059)
Socio-Economic Status		.511*** (.192)	.292 (.207)	.35** (.151)
Age		.013* (.008)	.007 (.008)	-.008 (.006)
Ethnicity		1.851*** (.437)	2.327*** (.507)	1.221*** (.326)
Political Ideology			.243*** (.058)	.202*** (.041)
Nuclear Knowledge			-.381** (.18)	-.056 (.13)
Threat Perception			.174*** (.061)	.129*** (.047)
Observations	265	245	239	452
Pseudo R ²	.007	.046	.103	.07

Standard errors are in parentheses

**** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$*

Regressions were run with respondents that answered manipulation checks correctly

²⁴ Descriptive statistics for these variables are in Appendix 4.

Respondents' written answers to questions about their own death are further revealing in support of the main finding. First, there is a small but significant decrease ($p=.04$) in support for a nuclear strike when respondents wrote more words in response to the two MS inducing questions. This suggests that when individuals think deeply about their death, they are less willing to support nuclear weapons. This could be that extended period of intensively dealing with the thought reduces the stimulation of existential terror and fear of death. This is similar to the patterns of written responses when respondents are asked to describe the emotions that the thought of their own death arouses. When individuals expressed indifference, content, or even relief towards their own death, the support for a nuclear strike was high. For example, some comments read:

'Do not think about it and do not deal with it.'

'Something I do not think about and have no relation to it I am a believing person.'

'Life in heaven. Can I still see what's going on in this world?'

'An end of suffering.'

'Sad for my family. How will they manage?'

'Does not bother me at all.'

'Answer before God.'

'My indifference to death is just a shame [for] the family and those around.'

The survey also showed comprehensive support for a conventional strike. While there have been polls that explore whether Israelis would support or oppose a conventional attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, they are ambiguous about the specifics of such an attack ("Israeli Public Opinion Polls: Attitudes Toward Iran" 2017; Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky 2010). They give few details on the type of attack, location of the attack, or estimated casualties. In 2009, 59% of

Jewish Israelis supported a conventional attack on Iranian nuclear facilities if they learned that Iran has nuclear weapons (Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky 2010, 24). The results of the current survey show that support is higher in a specific scenario: 73.57% of respondents answered in the affirmative of the conventional strike. Another 10.88% said they neither supported nor disapproved of a strike. A mere 15.54% were against it.²⁵ Mortality salience does not explain the high support for the conventional strike (see Appendix 5, Table 2). That is likely because Israelis in general are hawkish and in support of the use of conventional force in threat scenarios. That is, they do not need to be reminded of their mortality to support a conventional strike.

Discussion

The demonstrated intersection of international relations and social psychology contributes to a new thinking on public opinion on the use of nuclear weapons. Overall, this research advances a current understanding of why nuclear weapons disarmament, elimination, and non-proliferation are not progressing. It has three broader implications. First, it suggests that Israel cannot rely on public aversion to avoid nuclear warfare. Reminders of death and a realistic threat scenario of a nuclear Iran affect individuals' attitudes by making them less risk averse. If mortality salience is triggered by a proxy event in international security, individuals are more likely to be supportive of military actions. That is important since public opinion matters in foreign policy. If the majority of electorate supports nuclear weapons, a hawkish leader might be more intrigued to take aggressive military action. With Iranian nuclear proliferation efforts continued, this can become faster relevant than expected. Foreign policy plays a crucial role for Israelis as they vote on foreign policy as much as they do on economic and religious policies (Tomz, Weeks, and

²⁵ Among respondents that answered all manipulation checks correctly.

Yarhi-Milo 2018). Knowing that the public might support a hawkish leader is significant especially in times when populist authoritarian leaders stoke up mass anxieties and uncertainties. The role of responsible and cautious leaders and institutions becomes crucial.

Second, the main finding for the support of the use of nuclear weapons is based on a first strike by Israel. Albeit a grim implication, it is important to note that Iran has not developed a nuclear weapon and there is currently no direct threat from a nuclear country to Israel. Third, the work carries wider implications for the importance of including Arabs in Israeli surveys. The findings showed that Jews are more hawkish than Arabs, even in the case of a nuclear first strike. With a growing Arab population, their opinion on foreign policy matters. The tendency to exclude Arabs because their opinion on national security matter is radical different from Jews and misrepresent the Jewish character of the country, is – to say the least- misleading and fallacious. Only 11.11% of Arabs are supportive of a nuclear strike, compared to 56.86% of Jews. Albeit Israel is a flawed democracy, public opinion still matters. Because of Arabs, the average public opinion is less hawkish than it would be otherwise the case.

There are two possible limitation to the experiment. First, it does not study the length of effects (Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007) – a typical issue in EoC studies. In other words, the treatment effect might not last longer than a few minutes or hours and has therefore little significance in the real world. Respondents rarely face a direct reminder of their death. However, there are conflict events that act as proxy for the reminders of death. Second, there are likely other factors in the real world that can have an impact on one's attitude. Academic experimental studies fall short in replicating all such impacting factors to predict real-life attitudes. It nevertheless does not challenge its strength of highlighting a specific causal factor and its internal validity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was the investigation of determinants of domestic support for nuclear weapons. The results suggest that the degree of public willingness to support the usage of nuclear weapons is stronger than regular polls suggest. These findings corroborate previous experimental studies that challenge the robustness of the nuclear norm. I have also argued that these studies explore the causes of support for nuclear weapons but not the effect of a specific causes. Performing a survey experiment on more than 1000 Israelis, I find that mortality salience has a significant effect on individuals' willingness to support for nuclear attacks. There is a longstanding norm against nuclear weapons, but recent studies suggest that public adherence to this norm is weaker than typically assumed. Smetana and Vranka (2020) and Rathbun and Stein (2020) retribution, deference to authority, and in-group loyalty as explanation for approval of nuclear strikes. I join this scholarship by providing TMT as new explanation of why people may violate the nuclear norm. People who are more routinely facing existential threats will support greater use of nuclear weapons. In Israel, the norm only has a minority support when strikes are suggested against a hostile country that developed nuclear weapons. At the same time, Israelis may not be supportive of strikes against a country lacking nuclear weapons. Thus, the fragility of the nuclear taboo appears, in part, when an existential threat exist. My findings join the scholarship that challenges the robustness of normative taboos and contest notions that human's psychological nature has moved away from violence.

Further research should investigate when theoretical MS translates into real life events. Can terror attacks, civil wars, or global health threats remind people of their finite existence and in turn increase their support for the use of force, and specifically nuclear weapons? In other words, what are proxy events that have the same effect as traditional TMT? This is important in

political decision-making. Individuals could be more inclined to support the use of nuclear weapons in times of crises that pose a reminder of mortality. In addition, the link between knowledge on nuclear weapons and support for the use should be further explored. Respondents with more knowledge on nuclear weapons find the nuclear strike less ethical ($p=.03$) and are less supportive of a first strike (Table 4, Model 3). An implementation of more nuclear education might decrease public support of a first strike. The finding of a recent study with the Japanese public proposed that the government cannot easily shift existing public opinion on nuclear prohibition (Baron, Gibbons, and Herzog 2020). Thus, the efforts of nonprofit organizations, think tanks, and research institutions are important in educating people and reducing support for nuclear weapons.

APPENDIX 1: IRB HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

FWA00000351
IRB00001138
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

January 31, 2020

Dear Doreen Horschig:

On 1/31/2020, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Category
Title:	An Illusional Nuclear Taboo: Mechanisms of Domestic Attitudinal Patterns for Extreme Methods of War
Investigator:	Doreen Horschig
IRB ID:	STUDY00001135
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Gillian Bernal", is positioned above the printed name.

Gillian Bernal
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY VIGNETTE ISRAEL



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL FLORIDA

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: “An Illusional Nuclear Taboo: Mechanisms of Domestic Attitudinal Patterns for Extreme Methods of War”

Principal Investigator: Doreen Horschig

Faculty Supervisor: Güneş Murat Tezcür Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

The purpose of this research is the investigation of patterns concerning public attitude towards foreign policy. Specifically, the study aims to gain insights into public opinion about several foreign policy decision that your government either has faced, is facing, or will likely be confronted with in the future.

Who Can Participate: We invite you to take part in a research study because you are an Israeli citizen or a permanent resident currently residing in Israel, over the age of 18, and have volunteered to participate. We expect about that 1700 people will be in this research.

Your active participation will take place online by clicking the *Start button* below. It will first ask you a series of questions about your demographics and then a few general questions about the use of force. Then you are provided with a newspaper article that has follow-up questions. The last question gives you the opportunity for self-expression.

Your active participation is expected to last no more than 10 to 15 minutes.

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You can decide to participate or not participate at any time with no consequences. No privately identifiable information will be collected from participants in the study. The study is completely anonymous.

The data will be stored on a cloud storage site that is encrypted and password protected for future research. The storage site is accessible only to the PI.

Parts of this study are being concealed from you in this Explanation of Research or you are not being told about the true nature of this study at the start. You will be given full details at the end of your participation in the study. Please be aware that some visuals in this survey are of sensitive nature.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, contact Doreen Horschig (PI), School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs at University of Central Florida, +1 (347) 798 6220, or by email at doreenhorschig@knights.ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email irb@ucf.edu.

Please complete the following survey.

Demographic Questions

Age

1. What is your year of birth?

Gender

2. What is your sex?

- ☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Neither. Please Specify: _____

Education

3. What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Elementary school or less
☐ Partial high school
☐ Complete high school
☐ Post high school, non-academic (teacher's seminar, nursing school, engineering school)
☐ Partial academic degree
☐ Full academic degree - BA
☐ Full academic degree - MA or higher
☐ Do not know/prefer not to respond

Geographic Location

4. Where are you from? Please specify the (nearest) town.

- ☐ Jerusalem District, _____
☐ Northern District, _____

- ☐ Haifa District, _____
- ☐ Central District, _____
- ☐ Tel Aviv District, _____
- ☐ Southern District, _____
- ☐ Judea and Samaria Area, _____
- ☐ Neither. Please Specify: _____

Socio-Economic Status²⁶

5. What is your social status?

- ☐ Upper class
- ☐ Upper middle class
- ☐ Middle class
- ☐ Lower class

Political Ideology

6. Please place yourself on a left (more liberal) to right (more conservative) political scale from 0-10.²⁷

	0 Liberal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Conservative
Please Answer											

Religious Affiliation

7. What is your current religion?

- ☐ Haredi
- ☐ Dati
- ☐ Masorti
- ☐ Hiloni
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Christian
- ☐ Druze
- ☐ No religion

²⁶ The question is adapted from the 2015 INES (Shamir 2015).

²⁷ The question in the survey uses a 11-point-scale that generates a high validity of left-right data (Kroh 2007). The left-right dimension is also applied in Israeli settings such as in INES. The common alignment 'liberal' and 'conservative' are added to left and right, respectively, for clarification.

☐ None of the above. Please Specify: _____

Religious Nationalist²⁸

8. To what extent do you define yourself as a religious-nationalistic?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ To a great degree
- ☐ To a very great degree
- ☐ Don't know or prefer not to answer

You will now be asked about issues of national security. Please answer to the best of your ability.

Baseline Questions

Moral Attitude Toward Nuclear Weapons

9. If Israel decides to use a nuclear weapon, how much would you approve or disapprove of this decision?

- ☐ Strongly Approve
- ☐ Somewhat Approve
- ☐ Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- ☐ Somewhat Disapprove
- ☐ Strongly Disapprove

10. How ethical or unethical do you think it would be if Israel uses a nuclear weapon?

	0 Highly Unethic al	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Highly Ethical
Please Answer								

Threat Perception

11. How concerned are you about the possibility that Israel will be attacked by an enemy next year?²⁹

²⁸ The template for the question is taken from the 2015 INES. The identity question replaces “feminist” with “religious-nationalist.”

²⁹ Perceived threat is measured using a seven-point Likert-type item, based on previous work on threats in times of war and conflict (Canetti et al. 2017; Canetti-Nisim, Ariely, and Halperin

	0 Not Concern ed at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very Concern ed
Please Answer								

Experiment

On the following page are two open-ended questions, please respond to them with your first, natural response.

I am looking for peoples' gut-level reactions to these questions.

This assessment is a recently developed, innovative personality assessment. Recent research suggests that feelings and attitudes about significant aspects of life tell us a considerable amount about the individual's personality. Your responses to this survey will be content-analyzed in order to assess certain dimensions of your personality. Your honest responses to the following questions will be appreciated.

Treatment Group 1 Only

12a. Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you.

13a. Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead.

2008; Huddy et al. 2002; Kam and Kinder 2007). Part of the wording was adapted to the most pertinent current and future threats to Israelis from Canetti et al. (2013).

Control Group Only

12b. Please briefly describe the emotions that eating arouses in you.

13b. Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think happens to you as you eat, and once you physically ate.

TMT Delay Question- All groups

12. Circle as many words as you can in the puzzle below.

Book	Computer
Desk	Phone
Movie	Train

S	R	E	T	U	P	M	O	C	O
W	P	H	O	N	E	R	E	E	B
A	M	U	S	I	C	P	Z	S	N
B	T	N	R	O	T	C	A	S	K
B	M	R	K	S	E	D	E	A	O
R	F	O	A	G	O	L	B	R	O
E	L	G	V	I	Z	B	O	G	B
P	A	N	U	I	N	E	L	W	Q

A G T A B E T G D O
P S C H O O L N I T

Please read the following article and answer the questions that follow. (All, randomly assigned nuclear or conventional condition)

Conventional Condition	Nuclear Condition
<i>Iran Now Capable of Targeting Israel with Nuclear Weapon</i> July 7, 2020 Press. TEL AVIV, Israel	
Various intelligence services have confirmed that the Iranian government is now capable of reaching all Israeli territories with nuclear weapons. This comes after tensions between the two countries have escalated in the past weeks. Both countries expect continued heavy fighting with many casualties if the conflict continues. Iranian elites have announced that they will not hesitate to use a nuclear weapon on Israeli territory if the Israeli government shows any aggression. Such a strike could kill thousands of Israeli citizens. Israel has discussed several military options to end the conflict as quick as possible. Some experts suggest an Israeli high-yield conventional weapon directed at the Iranian nuclear facility in Natanz where most nuclear weapons are produced and stored. The conventional weapon would assure that the facility and its underground infrastructure is completely destroyed and further production at the site impossible. Iran would likely surrender and end fighting. This could save thousands of Israeli lives in the long-term and nullify the Iranian nuclear program.³⁰	Various intelligence services have confirmed that the Iranian government is now capable of reaching all Israeli territories with nuclear weapons. This comes after tensions between the two countries have escalated in the past weeks. Both countries expect continued heavy fighting with many casualties if the conflict continues. Iranian elites have announced that they will not hesitate to use a nuclear weapon on territory if the Israeli government shows any aggression. Such a strike could kill thousands of Israeli citizens. Israel has discussed several military options to end the conflict as quick as possible. Some experts suggest an Israeli nuclear strike directed at the Iranian nuclear facility in Natanz where most nuclear weapons are produced and stored. The nuclear strike would assure that the facility and its underground infrastructure is completely destroyed and further production at the site impossible. Iran would likely surrender and end airstrikes on Israel. This could save thousands of Israeli lives in the long-term and nullify the Iranian nuclear program.

³⁰ While this is a positive prime it does not alternate the main findings of the study that TMT is an important effect of increased support. The prime is realistic in terms of how the government would frame such an attack.

Dependent Variables

Approval of Strike

13. Given the facts described in the article, if Israel decides to strike, how much would you approve or disapprove of this decision?

- ☐ Strongly Approve
- ☐ Somewhat Approve
- ☐ Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- ☐ Somewhat Disapprove
- ☐ Strongly Disapprove

Moral Attitude

14. How ethical or unethical do you think it would be if your country uses the nuclear weapon (*50% of respondents*)/ high-yield conventional bomb (*50% of respondents*)?

	0 Highly Unethic al	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Highly Ethical
Please Answer								

Physical Effects of the Use of a Nuclear Weapon

15. The use of the nuclear weapon in the article would cause the instant death of approximately half a million people³¹ killed by the blast wave, third-degree skin burns and eye injuries from radiation (some of which require amputation), and long-term effects including anemia, leukemia, and cancer. Do you approve or disapprove of your country's decision to strike? (*Nuclear Condition Only*)

- ☐ Strongly Approve
- ☐ Somewhat Approve
- ☐ Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- ☐ Somewhat Disapprove
- ☐ Strongly Disapprove

All Groups

Approval of Strike with Risk of Retaliation

³¹ This number is inflated. The aim here is not the accuracy of casualties but a test of how support changes when respondents are primed with such information.

16. Given the facts described in the article earlier, there will likely be retaliation with military operations against Israel. Do you approve or disapprove of your country's decision to strike?

- ☐ Strongly Approve
- ☐ Somewhat Approve
- ☐ Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- ☐ Somewhat Disapprove
- ☐ Strongly Disapprove

Manipulation Checks

17. Based on the article, what country was the target of the military strike in the article you just read?

18. Based on the article, what weapon do some experts suggest using to destroy the Iranian nuclear facility?

Knowledge on Nuclear Weapons

19. How many nuclear weapons have been used in conflict so far?

- ☐ 38
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 11
- ☐ 21
- ☐ 0

20. The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and Pakistan all possess nuclear weapons.

- ☐ True.
- ☐ False.

Israeli Nuclear Weapons

21. Do you believe Israel possesses nuclear weapons? (*Israeli Survey Only*)

- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ No.
- ☐ Do not know/prefer not to respond

Explorative Question

22. Are there any other thoughts, comments, or concerns about nuclear weapons that you would like to share?

Thank you for your participation.

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

For the study entitled:

“An Illusional Nuclear Taboo: Mechanisms of Domestic Attitudinal Patterns for Extreme Methods of War”

Dear Participant;

During this study, you were asked to answer questions on the use of force. You were told that the purpose of the study was the investigation of patterns concerning public attitude towards foreign policy. The actual purpose of the study was the investigation of determinants of domestic support for nuclear weapons: What factors influence public willingness to support the usage of nuclear weapons? It aimed to capture individuals' willingness to support or oppose conventional and nuclear attacks under different treatments to understand peoples' motivations. One group was treated with a reminder of their death, another with a reminder of the Covid-19 pandemic, and another received no treatment. All groups were presented with a realistic threat scenario (= the newspaper article) to understand whether an anti-nuclear norm becomes less robust if the salience of a security threat increases.

We did not tell you everything about the purpose of the study because doing so would have limited our ability to elicit truthful responses from our participants.

You are reminded that your original consent document included the following information: Participation in research is completely voluntary. You can decide to participate or not participate at any time with no consequences. If you have any concerns about your participation or the data you provided in light of this disclosure, please discuss this with us. We will be happy to provide any information we can to help answer questions you have about this study.

The responses in this study are de-identified and cannot be linked to you.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, think the research has hurt, would like to know the results of the survey, or have any other questions, please contact Doreen Horschig (PI), School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs at University of Central Florida, +1 (347) 798 6220, or by email at doreenhorschig@knights.ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office

of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

Please again accept our appreciation for your participation in this study.

APPENDIX 3: CODEBOOK

VARIABLE/ VARIABLE LABELS

Year of birth/ Yob (Q: What is your year of birth?)

Gender/ Gen (Q: What is your sex?)

- 1 Male (49.56%)
- 2 Female (50.24%)
- . Neither. Please Specify: _____ (0.2%)

Education/ Edu (Q: What is your highest level of education?)³²

- 1 Elementary school or less (1.17%)
- 2 Partial high school (1.07%)
- 3 Complete high school (23.8%)
- 4 Post high school, non-academic (teacher's seminar, nursing school, engineering school) (25.66%)
- 5 Partial academic degree (6.34%)
- 6 Full academic degree - BA (25.07%)
- 7 Full academic degree - MA or higher (14.63%)
- . Do not know/prefer not to respond (0.59%)
- . Other (1.66%)

Education by Groups/ EduGroups

- 1 Elementary school or less
- 2 Partial or complete high school, post high school, non-academic
- 3 Academic (Partial, Full, BA, MA, Higher)
- . Do not know, prefer not to respond, other

Geographic Location/ Geo (Where are you from? Please specify the (nearest) town.)

- 1 Jerusalem District, _____ (10.73%)
- 2 Northern District, _____ (14.24%)
- 3 Haifa District, _____ (13.95%)
- 4 Tel Aviv Central Area, _____ (44.39%)
- 5 Southern District, _____ (11.51%)
- 6 Judea and Samaria Area, _____ (1.56%)
- . Neither. Please Specify: _____ (3.61%)

+ 7 variables with specified town (*Geo_Jerusalem, Geo_Northern, Geo_Haifa, Geo_Central, Geo_Haifa, Geo_Central, Geo_Southern, Geo_Judea, Geo_Other*)

Socio-Economic Status/ SES (What is your social status?)

- 1 Upper class
- _____

³² The formulation is taken from the 2015 INES (Shamir 2015).

- 2 Upper middle class
- 3 Middle class
- 4 Lower class

Political Ideology/ Polit (Q: Please place yourself on a left (more liberal) to right (more conservative) political scale from 0-10.)

1 (liberal) -10 (conservative)

Religious Affiliation/ Rel (Q: What is your current religion?)

- 1 Orthodox
- 2 Religious
- 3 Traditional
- 4 Secular
- 5 Muslim
- 6 Christian
- 7 Druze
- 8 No religion
- 9 None of the above. Please Specify: _____

Religious Affiliation Jew or Arab/ RelJA

- 0 Arab
- 1 Jew

Religious Nationalistic/ Relnat (Q: To what extent do you define yourself as a religious-nationalistic?)

- 1 Not at all
- 2 A little
- 3 To a great degree
- 4 To a very great degree
- . Don't know or prefer not to answer

Israel Using a Nuclear Weapon/ Moral1 (Q: If Israel decides to use a nuclear weapon, how much would you approve or disapprove of this decision?)

- 5 Strongly Approve
- 4 Somewhat Approve
- 3 Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- 2 Somewhat Disapprove
- 1 Strongly Disapprove

Ethics of Nuclear Strike/ Moral2 (Q: How moral or immoral do you think it would be if Israel uses a nuclear weapon?)

Likert Scale 0 (Very Immoral) – 7 (Very Moral)

Threat Perception/ Threat (Q: How concerned are you about the possibility that Israel will be attacked by an enemy next year?)

Likert Scale 0 (Not concerned at all) – 7 (Very concerned)

Treatment Group 1

Treatment Group 1 Mortality Salience Death / T1MSQ1 (Q: Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you.)

Treatment Group 1 Mortality Salience Death / T1MSQ2 (Q: Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead.)

Treatment Group 2

Treatment Group 2 Mortality Salience Covid / T2MSQ1 (Q: Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of Covid-19 arouses in you.)

Treatment Group 2 Mortality Salience Covid / T2MSQ2 (Q: Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you if you get Covid-19 and once you have gotten Covid-19.)

Control Group/ CGQ1 (Q: Please briefly describe the emotions that eating arouses in you.)

Control Group/ CGQ2 (Q: Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think happens to you as you eat, and once you physically ate.)

Approval of Nuclear Strike/ NuclearStrike (Q: Given the facts described in the article, if Israel decides to strike, how much would you approve or disapprove of this decision?)

- 5 Strongly Approve
- 4 Somewhat Approve
- 3 Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- 2 Somewhat Disapprove
- 1 Strongly Disapprove

Moral Attitude Nuclear Strike/ NSMoral (Q: How moral or immoral do you think it would be if your country uses the nuclear weapon?)

Likert Scale 0 (Very Immoral) – 7 (Very Moral)

Physical Effects of the Use of a Nuclear Weapon/ EffectsNS (The use of the nuclear weapon in the article would cause the instant death of approximately half a million people killed by the blast wave, third-degree skin burns and eye injuries from radiation (some of which require amputation), and long-term effects including anemia, leukemia, and cancer. Do you approve or disapprove of your country's decision to strike?)

- 5 Strongly Approve
- 4 Somewhat Approve
- 3 Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- 2 Somewhat Disapprove

- 1 Strongly Disapprove

Approval of Conventional Strike/ ConvenStrike (Q: Given the facts described in the article, if Israel decides to strike, how much would you approve or disapprove of this decision?)

- 5 Strongly Approve
- 4 Somewhat Approve
- 3 Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- 2 Somewhat Disapprove
- 1 Strongly Disapprove

Moral Attitude Conventional Strike/ CSMoral (Q: How moral or immoral do you think it would be if your country uses the conventional weapon?)

Likert Scale 0 (Very Immoral) – 7 (Very Moral)

Retaliation to Nuclear & Conventional Strike/ RetalNSCS (Q: Given the facts described in the article earlier, there will likely be retaliation with military operations against Israel. Do you approve or disapprove of your country's decision to strike?)

- 5 Strongly Approve
- 4 Somewhat Approve
- 3 Neither Approve nor Disapprove
- 2 Somewhat Disapprove
- 1 Strongly Disapprove

Manipulation Check 1/ Manip1 (Q: Based on the article, what country was the target of the military strike in the article you just read?)

Manipulation Check 2/ Manip2 (Q: Based on the article, what weapon do some experts suggest using to destroy the Iranian nuclear facility?)

Knowledge on Nuclear Weapons/ Know1 (Q: How many nuclear weapons have been used in conflict so far?)

- 1 38
- 2 2
- 3 11
- 4 21
- 5 0

Knowledge on Nuclear Weapons/ Know2 (Q: The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and Pakistan all possess nuclear weapons.)

- 1 True
- 2 False

Knowledge on Nuclear Weapons Merged/ KnowNuk

- 0 Little -No Knowledge (No correct answer to Know1 and Know2)

- 1 Some Knowledge (1 correct answer to either Know1 or Know2)
- 2 Knowledgeable (Correct answers to either Know1 and Know2)

Israeli Possessing Nuclear Weapons/ IsraelNuk (Q: Do you believe Israel possesses nuclear weapons?)

- 0 No
- 1 Yes
- . Do not know/prefer not to respond

Explorative Question/ Explor (Q: Are there any other thoughts, comments, or concerns about nuclear weapons that you would like to share?)

Additional Demographical Variables provided by Survey Firm³³

All lowercase in dataset

*Dropped from dataset

***Termination Status/ stat**

- 1 Finished properly
- 2 Filtered
- 4 Started but did not finish

Device Type/device

- 1 Desktop/Computer
- 2 Smartphone/ Tablet

***Invitation/ Id**

Demographic quota code/ sekerID

User ID/uid

Country of birth/ cbor

Country of birth – father/ cborfa

Country of birth – mother/ cborma

Survey start time/ startTime

Survey end time/ endTime

Total survey time (Duration)/ totime

Age/ age

Year of birth/ byear

Year of immigration/ alyayear

Newly generated: Age of immigration/ ageimmi

Number of children/ kids

Year youngest kid born/ ykid

Year oldest kid born/ okid

Gender/ sex

- 1 male

³³ See also, <https://www.midgampanel.com/surveyData/dA.asp?id=7OKihliq2020213737>.

2 female

Marital status/ fstat

- 1 'Single'
- 2 'Married'
- 3 'Separated / Divorced'
- 4 'Widow'

District/ nafa

- 1 'Jerusalem'
- 2 'North'
- 3 'Haifa'
- 4 'Central'
- 5 'Tel Aviv'
- 6 'South'
- 7 'Judea and Samaria'
- 8 'Other/Abroad'

Education/ edu

- 1 'up to 8 years'
- 2 'up tp 9-10 years of schooling'
- 3 "up tp 9-10 years of schooling"
- 4 'High school student'
- 5 'High school graduate'
- 6 'During Non-Academic High School Studies'
- 7 'Graduate of non-academic high school'
- 8 'During undergraduate studies'
- 9 'Bachelor's degree'
- 10 'During Master's Degree Studies'
- 11 'Master's degree'
- 12 'During a doctoral dissertation'
- 13 'Holds a PhD'

Religion/ rel

- 1 'Jew'
- 2 'Christian'
- 3 'Muslim'
- 4 'Druze'
- 5 'Other'
- 6 'Lack of religion'

Religious Identification/ relid

- 1 'Secular'
- 2 'Traditional'
- 3 'Religious'
- 4 'Haredi'

Primary Occupation/ osek

- 1 'High School Student'
- 2 'Soldier'
- 3 'Student'
- 4 'Yeshiva student'
- 5 'Employee'
- 6 'Unemployed'
- 7 'Not looking for a job - other'
- 8 'Freelancer'
- 11 'Junior Manager'
- 12 'Intermediate Level Manager'
- 13 'Senior Manager'
- 14 'Moderate'
- 15 'Retired'
- 16 'Cooperative Member'
- 17 'Kibbutz member'

Income/ ses

- 0 'No income at all'
- 9 'No income at all'
- 1 'well below average'
- 2 'Below average'
- 3 'Average'
- 4 'Above average'
- 5 'Far above average'
- 6 'Not interested in answering'

***Continent of birth/ rcbor**

- 1 'Israel'
- 2 'Asia' Central America
- 4 'Eastern Europe'
- 5 'Maghreb'
- 6 'Middle East'
- 7 'North America'
- 8 'Oceania'
- 9 'South America'
- 10 'Former Soviet Union'
- 11 'Western Europe'
- 12 'Africa'

***Election 2015/ vote2015** *(data not provided)*

- 1 'Likud'
- 2 'The Zionist Camp'
- 3 The 'Common List'
- 4 'There is a future'

- 5 'All of us'
- 6 'The Jewish Home'
- 7 'Shas'
- 8 'Torah Judaism'
- 9 'Israel Beiteinu'
- 10 'March'
- 11 'Together the people with us'
- 12 'Green leaf'
- 13 'Other'
- 14 'Did not vote'
- 15 'Too young / does not know / refuses to answer'

1st Election 2019/ vote2019

- 1 'Likud'
- 2 'Blue and white'
- 3 'Shas'
- 4 'Torah Judaism'
- 5 'New / Canal'
- 6 'Labor Party'
- 7 'Yisrael Beiteinu'
- 8 'Union of the Right'
- 9 'March'
- 10 'all of us'
- 11 'Rem / Bled'
- 12 'The New Right'
- 13 'Other'
- 14 'Did not vote'
- 15 'Too young / does not know / refuses to answer'

2nd Election 2019/ vote2019b

- 1 'Blue and white'
- 2 'Likud'
- 3 'The Common Arab List'
- 4 'Shas'
- 5 'Yisrael Beiteinu'
- 6 'Torah Judaism'
- 7 'Right'
- 8 'Labor Party'
- 9 'The Democratic Camp'
- 10 'Jewish Power'
- 11 'Other'
- 12 'Not voted'
- 13 'Too young / does not know / refuses to answer'.

Election 2020/ vote2020

- 1 'Likud'

- 2 'Blue and white'
- 3 The 'Common List'
- 4 'Shas'
- 5 'Torah Judaism'
- 6 'Labor-Bridge-March'
- 7 'Yisrael Beiteinu'
- 8 'Right'
- 9 'Other'
- 10 'Not voted'
- 11 'Too young / does not know / refuses to answer'

Additional Variables created

Age by Group/ agegrp

- 1 18-24
- 2 25-39
- 3 40-59
- 4 60+

APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY STATISTICS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Description	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Nuclear Strike	Ordinal variable to determine (non-) support for nuclear weapon use (from 1 if strongly disapprove to 5 if strongly approve)	508	3.283	1.388	1	5
Mortality Salience	Dichotomous variable (1 if treated with MS, 0 if 'treated' with reminder of eating)	678	.496	.5	0	1
Gender	Dichotomous variable (1 if male, 2 if female)	1020	1.503	.5	1	2
Geography	Categorical variable of districts (1 if Jerusalem District, 2 if Northern District, 3 if Haifa District, 4 if Tel Aviv Central Area, 5 if Southern District, 6 if Judea and Samaria Area)	986	3.378	1.24	1	6
Education	Ordinal variable of level of education (1 if Elementary school or less, 2 if Partial high school, 3 if Complete high school, 4 if Post high school, non-academic 5 if Partial academic degree, 6 if Full academic degree – BA, 7 if Full academic degree - MA or higher)	999	4.727	1.522	1	7
Political Ideology	Ordinal variable (from 0 if liberal to 10 if conservative)	1022	4.422	2.389	0	10
Socio-Economic Status	Ordinal variable of social standing (1 if upper class, 2 if upper middle class, 3 if middle class, 4 if lower class)	1022	2.75	.647	1	4
Year of Birth	Interval variable of the year people are born	1022	1978.182	15.419	1946	2002
Nuclear Knowledge	Ordinal variable (from 0 if no knowledge to 2 if knowledge)	1022	.745	.671	0	2
Threat Perception	Ordinal variable (0 if not concerned about possible attack, 7 if very concerned)	977	3.735	2.032	0	7
Ethnicity	Dichotomous variable (1 if Jew, 0 if Arab)	997	.904	.295	0	1

Table 2: Mean Attitude Towards Nuclear and Conventional Strike with Correct Manipulation

Checks

Group	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Nuclear Weapon			
T1	3.5	1.35	135
CG	3.07	1.45	130
Conventional Weapon			
T1	3.9	1.18	115
CG	3.77	1.16	1127

Table 3: Distribution of Sample by Age and Sex

Ages	Numbers			Row percentages in %		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
18-24	149	76	73	99.34	50.67	48.67
25-39	363	182	181	100	50.14	49.86
40-59	328	157	171	100	47.87	52.13
60+	183	93	90	99.45	50.54	48.91
Total	1023	508	515	99.8*	49.56	50.24

* 2 additional respondents identified as “neither”

APPENDIX 5: ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

Age, measured by year of birth, shows no significant tendencies on the attitude towards the use of a nuclear weapons in Models 1-4 in Table 4 of the main manuscript. To test whether older people are thinking more about death and are more affected by the treatment, an interaction term of age and MS was used but did not show any significance either ($p=0.9$). In additional models that measure age by various groups did not show significance either. Hence, no conclusions can be made on whether the younger or older generations are more hawkish.

The findings on tendencies among females and males are inconclusive. A large, mostly early body of literature has shown that women are less supportive of the use of violence and war than men (Baxter and Lansing 1983; Shapiro and Mahajan 1986; Wilcox, Ferrara, and Allsop 1993; R.C. Eichenberg 2003; R. Eichenberg and Stoll 2017). The gender hypothesis further suggests that females are inherently more inclined toward pacifism than males and that they are socialized early in life to be less militaristic. My findings in Models 1-3 suggest that this association is questionable and confirms several studies that challenge the gender hypothesis. A study of Israeli university students found that the hawks among the respondents were neither associated with females nor males (Jacobson and Bar-Tal 1995, 583). Sagan and Valentino more recently find that female respondents are no less likely to support the nuclear weapons use than their male counterparts (2017). However, there are some significant differences in Model 4 (main manuscript) when retaliation is mentioned and in Table 2 of this Appendix when asked about conventional weapons. Females tend to be less supportive of a conventional weapon than males.

The question on respondent's location explored differences in opinion depending on the spatial distribution. Are people living close to conflict in the Gaza Strip or in major city districts such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem more supportive of militarism because their locations are more likely to be an opponent's target? As Hirsch-Hoefler et al. found, not all Israeli civilians are exposed to violence to the same degree, resulting in differences in perceived distress and threat (2016, 845). The authors sampled Israelis from high risk states surrounding the Gaza Strip (North of the Southern District) and low risk (all other states). Those living in high-risk areas experience more exposure to violence and psychological stress and in turn have a higher threat perception and reduced individuals' willingness to compromise (Hirsch-Hoefler et al. 2016). Additional studies have found that exposure to violence increases support for belligerent policies (Gordon and Arian 2001; Echebarria-Echabe and Fernández-Guede 2006; Skitka et al. 2006). Israelis in the Judea and Samaria Area show the highest support for a nuclear strike (4.4) compared to lowest support in Haifa District (2.75) the market firm surveyed enough respondents from each region weighted on current country data.

Table 1: Linear Regression of the Effects of Mortality Salience on Individuals' Attitudes Towards the Use of a Nuclear

Weapon

VARIABLES	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)	(Model 5)
Mortality Salience	.427** (.172)	.416** (.175)	.335** (.166)	.333** (.165)	.229** (.113)
Gender		-.195 (.177)	-.261 (.168)	-.284* (.168)	-.374*** (.114)
Geography		.053 (.074)	.047 (.07)	.05 (.07)	-.015 (.048)
Education		-.095 (.058)	-.081 (.054)	-.081 (.054)	-.093** (.038)
Socio-Economic Status		.352** (.14)	.249* (.138)	.224 (.138)	.21** (.097)
Year of Birth		.006 (.006)	.001 (.006)	.001 (.006)	-.008** (.004)
Political Ideology			.143*** (.037)	.141*** (.037)	.124*** (.026)
Threat			.148*** (.041)	.147*** (.041)	.116*** (.029)
Nuclear Knowledge				-.194 (.126)	-.046 (.085)
_cons	3.069*** (.123)	-8.874 (11.766)	-.961 (11.185)	.205 (11.178)	17.646** (7.43)
Observations	265	250	244	244	461
R-squared	.023	.074	.198	.207	.174

Standard errors are in parentheses

**** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$*

Regressions were run with respondents that answered manipulation checks correctly

Table 2: Israelis' Attitudes Towards the Use of a Conventional Weapon by Demographics

Variable	Conventional Strike
Gender	-.788*** (.216)
Geography	-.065 (.088)
Education	-.183** (.072)
Political Ideology	.157*** (.048)
Socio-Economic Status	.165 (.187)
Year of Birth	.013* (.007)
Nuclear Knowledge	.005 (.152)
Threat Perception	.16*** (.058)
Ethnicity	2.673*** (.417)
Observations	337
Pseudo R ²	.116

Standard errors are in parentheses

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

APPENDIX 6: A NOTE ON RESEARCH ETHICS

The potential impact of the study of nuclear weapons as well as the TMT framework are sensitive and dreadful and should strictly comply with the “do no harm” principle (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2015, 146). The questions in the survey are phrased to prevent any possible psychological harm.³⁴ Specifically, the experience of MS on participants was expected to be low threshold feelings because no new ones are induced but existing ones. The given scenario of the newspaper vignette is hypothetical and there is no real current threat about which they have to make a decision on the use of nuclear weapons. Mentioning to the respondents that the scenario is hypothetical would reduce the treatment’s effectiveness, however. That is why respondents that feel uncomfortable in taking the survey or feel as the number of potential casualties has a psychologically harming effect, can exit the survey at any time. The survey was completely voluntary, and the local polling firm ensured its anonymity. Further, Israelis’ opinions on nuclear weapons are not used or exploited by any third parties but are for the sole purpose of this academic research only.

Unless the respondents are over the age of 80, they will not remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thus, unless Israelis make a conscious efforts to use educational nuclear resources, most will not grasp the real impact of a nuclear weapon. While this poses a challenge to the external validity of my results, it mitigates the risk of a harmful psychological impact. The ethical challenges do not hinder the successful implementation of the experiment. To go beyond the ‘do no harm’ principle I hope to initiate the translation of my findings into Hebrew and distribute them without a paywall. Further, I added an optional open-ended question to the

³⁴ Appendix 1 includes the approval of the University of Central Florida’s institutional review board (IRB).

survey that gives respondents an opportunity to express any thoughts or opinions about nuclear weapons instead of simply meeting the researcher's agenda. The majority of answers to this question confirmed a conscious norm against the use of nuclear weapons. Respondents wrote variants of "using nuclear weapons is a red line that should never be crossed," "the most effective use of nuclear weapons is deterrence," and "all nuclear weapons should be destroyed."

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