Iranians and the Bomb: Tales From the Demand Side
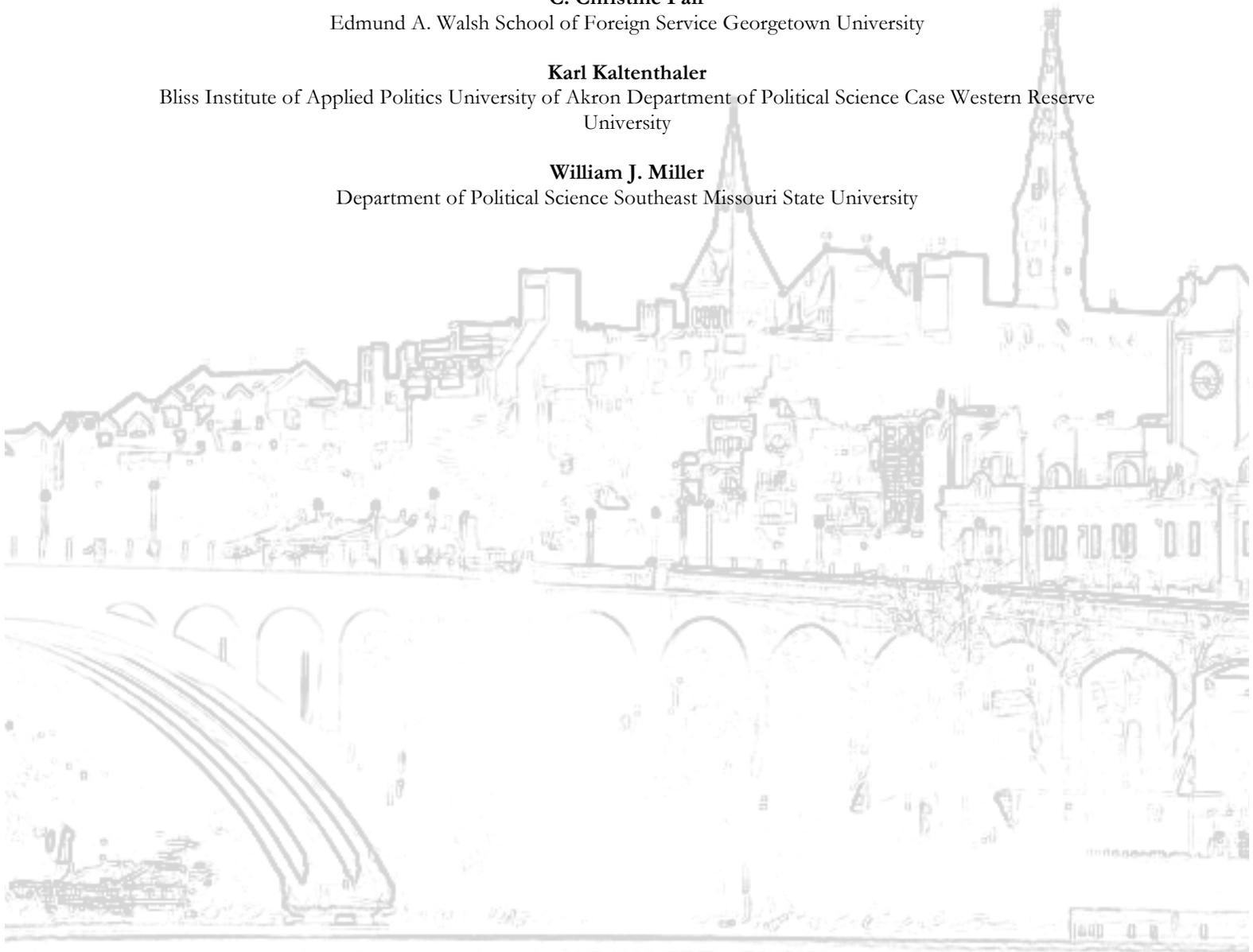
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Abstract

This essay exposits the Iranian public's beliefs about Iran developing nuclear weapons. In some measure, it also explains how and why Iranians have differing opinions about this important policy issue. In order to understand these views, we develop a set of hypotheses drawn from the literatures that address international trust, norms, and government trust. We next test these hypotheses in effort to explain observed variation in Iranian individual-level attitudes toward developing nuclear weapons. We find that when it comes to developing nuclear weapons, approximately 25% of surveyed Iranians support their government's purported right to do so. Our regression analyses to evaluate these models indicate that a respondent's degree of international trust, norms about the legitimacy of developing nuclear weapons, and trust in the Iranian government explain in some measure the observed variation in Iranian support for developing nuclear weapons. These findings suggest the Iranian polity, similar to publics elsewhere, uses very general predispositions to determine the stances they take on foreign policy issues and their country's nuclear future rather than reliance upon detailed information about other national security concerns of the state.

Key words: Iranian nuclear proliferation, Iranian public opinion, international trust, norms, government trust

Iranians and the Bomb: Tales from the Demand Side

Introduction

Iran's nuclear ambitions vex the international community, bringing the Islamic Republic into ever-sharpening conflict with the United States and its key European allies (Dueck and Takeyh 2007). The United States, working with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom), and the European Commission, among others, has sought to increase the pressure on Iran in a variety of ways, including increased bilateral sanctions and through UNSC Chapter VII resolutions. While calls for military action were most prevalent during President Bush's tenure, President Barack Obama's initial approach of engaging the regime through diplomacy has failed to fructify and thus the Obama administration has publicly discussed punitive approaches (Cooper and Landler 2010). Israel, an important American ally, is increasingly considering military action to retard Iran's program (Levinson 2010). Needless to say, such an attack would be inflammatory across the Muslim world, the inhabitants of which are already deeply vexed by the enduring Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the U.S. unwavering support for Israel, the U.S. invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and widespread apprehensions about the intentions of the U.S. throughout the Muslim world (Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies 2009). This is true, notwithstanding the recent information available through Wikileaks about some Arab leaders' antipathy towards Iran and even support for military action to preclude the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons (Black and Tisdall 2010).

Given the high stakes of Iran's nuclear brinkmanship, a number of organizations have undertaken polling of the Iranian public to assess the degree to which Iran's citizenry supports the regime's foreign and domestic policies, including its nuclear ambitions (Global Opinion Trends 2002–2007: A Rising Tide Lifts Mood In The Developing World – Sharp Decline in Support for Suicide Bombing in Muslim Countries 2007; Mogahed 2008; Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians, and al Qaeda 2007; Poll of Iranians and Americans 2008; Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Iran before the June 12, 2009 Presidential Elections 2009.) An important but ultimately unanswerable question is whether or not Iranian public opinion matters in influencing the decisions of the authoritarian regime (Sadjapour 2007).

However, there are compelling reasons to believe it does. Iran's regime has invested considerable resources in securing and sustaining popular support to maintain regime legitimacy. Iran regularly conducts elections at federal and sub-national levels even if the candidates who can contest the elections are vetted by the regime's Council of Guardians, reflecting the importance of popular attitudes towards policy issues at home and abroad. At the sub-national level, there is less scrutiny and thus Iranians tend to view these elections as more genuinely reflecting the public's preference (Public Opinion in Iran and America on Key International Issues 2007). The importance of the Iranian street was clearly evident in 2009 when widespread protests broke out following President Ahmadinejad's flawed 2009 re-election. While the mass gatherings initially focused upon supporting his reformist challenger, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, they soon transformed into the "Green Revolution," which challenged the regime's legitimacy. In a further embarrassment to the regime, Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of grand ayatollah Khomeini who led the Iranian revolution, along with almost all of his descendants, supports the Green Movement (Dehghanpisheh 2010). The mobilization, which episodically rejuvenates, has disquieted the regime and motivated it to use ever more coercive means to repress the movement (Amanpour 2011). No doubt, the recent political revolutions seizing Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Bahrain (among others) no doubt has galvanized the Iranian regime to further repress opposition (How Iran keeps revolution from flowering on streets of Tehran, 2011).

Notably for purposes of this analysis, the regime has energetically cultivated popular support for its controversial nuclear aspirations, variously defined but usually described as developing a "full nuclear fuel cycle;" rather than a nuclear weapons capability. This has been most evident during the tenure of President Ahmadinejad. He has successfully pulled the debate about Iran's nuclear policy out of the discrete purview of policy elites and into the public domain. In doing so, he has framed the nuclear issue as one of "national independence that would stymie foreign powers seeking to deprive Iran of its rightful place—as a major international and technological power" (Barzefar 2009, 24). By most accounts, he has been successful. Numerous polls of Iranians find that, among Iran's political elite and general public alike, there is a near unanimous belief that Iran should have a "full nuclear fuel cycle" (Barzefar 2009, 26). Iran's strategic calculus appears to resemble the Indian path to nuclearization: India pushed the development of its civilian capacity

until the time it actually tested in 1998. (India previously tested in 1974, but those tests were largely a failure Moreover, India's covert nuclear capacity served as an existential deterrent (Tellis, 2001, pp. 90-2001; Fair, 2005). This was also the case with Pakistan, which behaved as a nuclear power long before it actually tested in 1998 (Kapur 2007).

Implicitly U.S. policy assumes that Iranian public opinions matter as well. The previous Bush administration explicitly sought to reach out to the Iranian public, which it believed to be amenable to regime change and could have utility in achieving that objective. In 2005, the US Congress passed the Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2005, which appropriated $10 million and directed the President of the United States to use these resources to fund groups that are opposed to the Iranian government. President Bush praised the allocation of these so-called regime change funds as the first step in promoting popular efforts to overthrow Iran's theocratic government and to forge a liberal democracy in its place.

More recently, after the public burst into protests on June 12, 2009 over the flawed presidential election, Twitter (a social network that allows users to quickly pass small messages to large groups) emerged as a key tool in organizing the demonstrations. Twitter had planned a major update in the wake of the protests, which would have put Twitter off-line. The U.S. State Department, in a radical departure from its usual practice, asked Twitter to delay the upgrade to facilitate further popular mobilization (Grossman 2009). Regime efforts to shut down the social networking tool failed. This again underscores the value of public opinion both to the regime and to outside forces seeking to mobilize the public to force political upheaval against the regime.

Despite the proliferating polls of Iranian public, there is no theoretical literature that exposits how relevant—much less effective—public opinion is in conditioning the policy choices of an authoritarian regime. While there have been several studies that have explored the regime's likely course of action with respect to developing a nuclear weapons capability and what factors may shape these decisions, this body of literature about state motives cannot easily be used to offer a series of propositions about why publics may approve of or reject a state's policy. Moreover, there is little theoretical guidance about which techniques of polling are more suitable for gauging public attitudes within highly constrained authoritarian regimes wherein

respondents may fear that participating in a survey or answering particular questions in specific ways may cause them harm. Consequently, some firms field their surveys using phone-interviews from call-centers within or without Iran, while others used face-to-face techniques. As discussed below, both of these methods have strengths and weaknesses yet proponents of each method tend to argue for the superiority of their method.

Perhaps for these reasons, many of the extant polling efforts and/or residual products are almost always mere presentations of tabulations geared to produce media headlines but little exposition about what the data may mean. Available analytical products afford few insights into the determinants of why Iranians may support the development of nuclear weapons.[1] Unfortunately, some of the firms that do such work in Iran do not make respondent-level data available. The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) is one that does provide scholars access to their respondent-level data. This essay, using logistic regression, employs that organization's most recent data derived from a national survey of 710 Iranians in 2008. This paper aims to shed greater light on whether and why Iranians support developing nuclear weapons and equally important, who does not and why. This effort will enable analysts to discern with greater clarity the distance that exists between the regime's stated position on key policy questions and the variegated public over which the regime governs.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Next, it presents a brief discussion of Iran's nuclear program and a synopsis of contemporary debates about why Iran is likely pursuing a full nuclear-fuel cycle with possibilities for weaponization. In the third section, it describes the data employed in this survey and its relative strengths and weaknesses compared to previous surveys. This section addresses forthrightly the methodological issues that are inherent in the various polling efforts of Iranians. Fourth, it sets forth several hypotheses that are tested with these data. The penultimate section of this paper details the analytical results. Finally, it concludes with several implications that directly follow from this analysis.

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[1] One exception is Fair and Shellman (2008). As the authors of that paper note, they confronted a serious technical issue as the data they used from the 2006 survey of Iranians conducted by the United States Institute of Peace and the Program on International Policy Attitudes split the sample on key questions pertaining to support for the program.

Tales from the Demand Side

As noted above, there is no empirical literature that explains why publics may or may not support a state's development of nuclear weapons. That said, there is an important literature that offers explanation for why states may want to develop nuclear weapons. We argue that the strategic calculations that policy-making elites make when deciding to develop nuclear weapons may be very different from the way the general public thinks about that policy issue.

Analyses of nuclear breakout tend to be framed as supply-side or demand-side. The former focuses upon the availability of technological and human assets such as centrifuges and centrifuge technology, provision of reactors and fissile material among other resources, which states require for successful nuclearization. Proponents of the value of supply-side analyses argue that expositing which supply-related factors facilitate nuclearization (e.g. commercial sales) may inform efforts to fortify the global nonproliferation regime. Moreover, irrespective of a state's *demand* for such technologies, robust supply-side deterrence will prevent them from successfully obtaining the same (Fuhrmann 2009, Kroenig 2009a, 2009b).

Demand-side proponents argue that restricting supply is difficult and thus efforts must also be made to identify and mitigate the underlying reasons for a state's desire to nuclearize (Jo and Gartzke 2007; Sagan 1996/7; Singh and Way 2004). Curiously with respect to Iran, there has been surprisingly little work on either supply or demand side determinants (Bowman 2008; Fair and Shellman 2008). As this is essentially a demand-side inquiry, it is useful to put forth some of the prevailing explanations for why state's desire nuclear weapons with particular reference to the Iran case. While this is an important background discussion about Iran's program, it should be understood that there is absolutely no empirical evidence that suggests that state motivations for nuclearization neatly map onto public support. However, as noted in the introduction, this discussion is not entirely inutile as Iran (as well other recently nuclearizaed states such as India and Pakistan) have made great efforts to garner public support for the regime's policies (Ahmed and Cortright 1998; Cortright and Mattoo 1997).

Scott Sagan has proposed three "models" to explain states' demand for nuclear weapons. His basic models are useful to frame this discussion. The first of these models is the traditional security model whereby

states seek nuclear weapons to confer a deterrent against overwhelming conventional military threats, against a nuclear-armed nemesis, or as coercive tools to compel changes in the status quo. In this model, states develop nuclear weapons to balance against its main rivals. Sagan's second model is the "domestic politics" model, which focuses upon the domestic actors who influence the state decision to pursue nuclear weapons. Sagan's third model is the "norms model," which focuses upon norms about weapons acquisition and upon nuclear weapons' symbolic functions. This model privileges deeper beliefs about what actions are legitimate and appropriate in international relations rather than realist national security calculations (Sagan 1996/7).

Given that no single framework proffered by Sagan (or others) can explain a state's decision to nuclearize comprehensively much less offer insights into popular support for such policies, it is worthwhile to put forward a number of possible explanations for Iran's program in light of his three models.

With respect to the security framework, many commentators point to Iran's strategic competitors, nuclear-armed Israel and the United States. Indeed Iran has ample reasons to desire a nuclear deterrent to confer upon Iran immunity from various forms of coercion. U.S. military interventions in Iran's neighboring states of Iraq and Afghanistan—neither of which had nuclear weapons—and Israel's bombing of Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility in 1981 may motivate the clerical elite to pursue a nuclear deterrent to prevent such military adventurism against the state or the regime (Bowman 2008; Entessar 2009; Dorraj 2006; Dueck and Takeyh 2007).

Less considered are the potential threats from Pakistan. While Iran obtained nuclear technology from Pakistan, relations between the two neighbors have been strained since the mid-1990s due to Pakistan's support of Sunni militants, including the Taliban, in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Several Sunni militant groups have targeted Shia populations in Pakistan and in Afghanistan.[2] In 1998, Iran nearly came to blows with Pakistan and Taliban-governed Afghanistan when its diplomats (widely believed to have been intelligence agents) were killed in Mazar-e-Sharif. Iran held Pakistan responsible as Pakistan's external

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[2] Note that while Iran may be vexed by the militant groups that target Shia, Iran is responsible for the sanguinary sectarian conflict plaguing Pakistan. Iran began buttressing Shia militant groups in the 1970s both a as a part of its foreign policy to export its revolution but also in part to curb Zia al Haq's Islamization efforts in Pakistan which privileged Sunni Islam at the expense of Pakistan's Shia. Iraq and other Arab states reciprocated by funding and supporting anti-Shia Sunni sectarian groups. While the Shia militant groups have been largely extirpated, Sunni groups continue to operate with increasing lethality in Pakistan.

intelligence agency, the Interservices Intelligence Directorate, mentored, trained, and supported the Taliban. The antipathy that exists between Iran and nuclear-armed Pakistan resulting from inter alia Pakistan's past and present cultivation of Sunni extremist groups in the region and various military alliances with the United States are persistent antagonisms and may, in principle, comprise reasonable motivation for Tehran's program (Bowman 2008; Entessar 2009; Dorraj 2006; Dueck and Takeyh 2007).

It is possible that this cluster of issues may disconcert Iran's public to varying degrees, which may in turn support nuclearization as a possible counter to one or more of these perceived threats.

The domestic politics model offers important insights. There are several domestic constituencies in Iran that have a vested interest in nuclearization, including apex leadership within the Revolutionary Guards and the Guardians Council as well as specific political leaders. Such proponents of nuclear weapons contend that the Islamic Republic is in constant danger from necrotic external forces, which seek to undermine the regime and its leadership. These institutions have positioned themselves as the most important defenders of the Islamic republic and have argued for military self-reliance (Bowman 2008; Entessar 2009; Dorraj 2006; Dueck and Takeyh 2007). President Ahmadinejad has characterized himself as the most suitable leader to protect Iran's equities regionally and globally.

Finally, the norms model also has some explanatory power for the Iran case. Numerous commentators have argued that the regime—and Iran's citizenry for that matter—may value nuclear weapons as they may confer great power status to Iran, which Iran believes it inherently deserves consistent with Iran's ancient cultural, human and hydrocarbon resources (Bowman 2008; Entessar 2009; Dorraj 2006; Dueck and Takeyh 2007). This was also the case with India which saw nuclearization as a route to great power status and even UNSC membership (Talbott, 2006; Fair, 2005). Status, albeit different in concept and to a lesser degree than India, motivated Pakistan's desire to obtain an "Islamic Bomb" (Rais, 2005).[3]

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[3] The authors are aware that India and Pakistan—like Israel—have acquired nuclear weapons *outside* of the NPT as non-signatories whereas Iran is a signatory to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. However, as Iran has adopted much of India's rhetoric (e.g. "nuclear apartheid") the comparisons are valid despite the differences in the legal statuses of the programs. For a discussion of Iran's rhetoric compared to that of India, see Fair 2007a; Fair 2007b..

The Iranian Mass Public's Opinion of Nuclear Weapons

The issue of developing nuclear weapons is certainly a primary policy concern for the Iranian regime because of the potential long-term security consequences. There is every reason to believe that whatever course the Iranian regime chooses, the policy-makers involved have weighed the pros and cons of developing nuclear weapons with a great deal of concentration and reference to pertinent information. It is reasonable to assume that the Iranian mass public has not used the same process of deliberating this issue if for no reason than there is an information asymmetry between the security enclave and the public.

Myriad studies of foreign policy attitudes have argued over the years that the public, in every country that has been studied, is not well informed or aware of issues of foreign policy. Early studies of mass attitudes of foreign policy argued that the foreign policy attitudes held by the mass public lacked consistency and coherence (Almond 1950; Converse 1964). Subsequent studies found that foreign policy attitudes are more structured than originally assumed, but they are not based on developed mental models that tie complex aspects of foreign policy issues together. These more recent studies have found that the average person is a "cognitive miser" when it comes to processing information about foreign policy (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987). This means that the average opinion-holder takes cognitive short-cuts to understand complex issues, such as are typical when contemplating foreign policy. The typical person uses what are referred to by Hurwitz and Peffley (1987) as "cognitive heuristics." The most important cognitive heuristics are the core values that an individual holds about the world. Core values are values that do not refer directly to governmental actions or policies (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987: 1105). These core values, in the American case, were beliefs about the morality of warfare and ethnocentrism, then, in turn, shape general postures toward issues such as militarism, anti-Communism, and isolationism. According to Hurwitz and Peffley (1987: 1106), postures are normative beliefs about the correct stance or orientation the government should take in foreign policy. These postures are thus more specific than core values in guiding an individual's foreign policy preferences. These general postures then shape the individual's view on specific foreign policy issues. Thus the core values, which are very broad and basic predispositions toward foreign policy issues, are the most important guides for individuals to determine their stances on matters of foreign affairs.

Empirical studies have shown that core beliefs are the most important factors shaping mass public attitudes toward domestic public policy and foreign policy issues in a variety of countries (Feldman 1988; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Peffley and Hurwitz 1992; Hurwitz, Peffly, and Seligson 1993; Shamir and Arian 1994). While we are assuming that these studies offer insights for this analysis, these analyses could suggest that the Iranian public may not use the same cognitive map as the Iranian foreign policy elites. If the above-noted studies offer explanatory value, the Iranian mass public is likely using a much more simplistic means of forming opinions on the issue of developing nuclear weapons. The Iranian public is much more likely than the foreign policy elite to refer to its core values when confronted with the issue of what to do about the issue of developing nuclear weapons.

What core values would the Iranian public make reference to when thinking about foreign policy? While there is absolutely no literature on "Iranian core foreign policy values," we develop and subsequently test a model of public demand for nuclear weapons that builds on the work of Sagan (1996/1997) and that of Hurwitz and Peffley (1987) that isolates the core values we believe are pertinent to mass attitudes toward nuclear weapons development. Derived from the afore-given discussion of core values, the three core values that are most likely to be important to an individual contemplating her government's developing nuclear weapons are: her level of trust in other countries; her normative predisposition toward the legitimacy of nuclear weapons and the legitimacy of violence; and her degree of trust in her own government. The core value of international trust comports to Sagan's model of threat and, to a degree, Hurwitz and Peffley's core value of ethnocentrism. The core value of the normative acceptance of nuclear weapons is similar to Sagan's norms model and Hurwitz and Peffley's core value of the morality of violence. Our identified core value of government trust does not have a counterpart in the models offered by Sagan and Hurwitz and Peffley. We include this core value because we believe it is a crucial factor in determining if an individual will support her government's attempts to develop nuclear weapons.

We posit that the core value of the morality of violence may be of great importance to those contemplating their country's development of nuclear weapons. Those who believe that the use of violence to achieve one's interests is moral are more likely to favor developing nuclear weapons. Likewise, those who

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believe it is immoral to use violence to achieve one's interests would be less likely to support developing

nuclear weapons, or any other devastating weapon, for that matter, as they would believe such weapons are

inherently tools of violence. This leads to the hypothesis:

> *H(1): Iranians who are convinced that the use of force is moral will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.*

Likewise, those people who view that the development of nuclear weapons goes against their moral

code, are more likely to oppose the development of nuclear weapons. There may be those individuals who

believe the development of nuclear weapons is an affront to their basic values, even when not contemplating

them as tools of violence. Such individuals may believe that such weapons are prohibited by their morality

and would thus oppose their development. This possibility yields the hypothesis:

> H(2): *Iranians who are convinced that their morality permits the creation of nuclear weapons will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.*

The second core value of interest to understanding views in Iran toward nuclear weapons is an

individual's sense of trust for other nations. This may be distinct from the individual's views on the morality

of violence or nuclear weapons. This level of trust in other countries is essentially a product of the general

level of trust the individual has in other people. We know from studies of trust that the more different people

are from the individual, the less likely that an individual is to trust those people (Uslaner 2001). Thus, people

who do not trust people who are like them are very unlikely to trust people who are not similar to them.

Thus, people who do not trust others in their own ethnic and social group are particularly unlikely to trust

foreigners (Binning 2007; Brewer et al 2004; Brewer and Steenbergen 2002; Citrin and Sides 2008; Herreros

and Criado 2009; Torgler 2007).

Trust in others will condition how likely one is to want to develop weapons to deter an attack or

defend oneself. Logically, those who are distrustful of other countries would want their government to be

vigilant in the face of possible attack. As Sagan (1996/1997) notes with security elites valuing nuclear

weapons for their deterrence potential, it is likely that many members of the mass public may view nuclear

weapons in a similar fashion. In general, those Iranians who express distrust of other countries are more likely to support developing nuclear weapons. This yields:

H(3): Those Iranians who view other countries as threats will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.

Trust in others tends to arise from a sense of security and optimism about the future (Inglehart 1990; 1997). Trust develops because people are willing to take the chance of trusting others and getting burned. Those who believe that they are in a precarious position in life are less willing to take the chance that others may do them harm, and thus are less likely to be trusting of others. One thing that tends to provide individuals with a sense of optimism and security is education (Inglehart 1990). Those who have higher levels of education tend to also believe that they can "take the chance" on others because they have assets to fall back on (their skills) if they bet wrong and others harm them. We posit then that the more educated one is, the more trusting one is likely to be in other countries, and thus the less likely one is to want her government to develop nuclear weapons. This gives rise to the hypothesis that the more educated an Iranian is, the more we would expect them to oppose the development of nuclear weapons.

H(4): *Iranians who have lower levels of educational attainment will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.*

Our third core value of interest is trust in the government. We contend that because nuclear weapons are such devastating tools of statecraft, and their development is not likely to be taken lightly by many individuals, people are prone to only want a government that they trust to develop them. In other words, if an individual has little trust in her government, she is not likely to want that government to develop nuclear weapons as those weapons could be misused with devastating consequences. Likewise, those who have high levels of trust in their government would be more willing to trust that government with developing nuclear weapons. This produces the hypothesis:

H(5): *Iranians who have higher levels of trust in their government will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.*

The following sections of this paper are devoted to exploring these ideas through empirical analysis.

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The Data and Their Relative Strengths and Weaknesses[4]

The data used to test the aforementioned set of hypotheses comes from a 2008 PIPA survey. PIPA fielded its survey, along with Search for Common Ground (SCG), in Iran using face-to-face surveys of 710 respondents between January 13 and February 9, 2008. Overall, the survey's margin of error is +/- 3.8%. PIPA used a multistage stratified, province-based sample (Poll of Iranians and Americans 2008). This poll builds upon a previous survey fielded by PIPA, SCG and the United States Institute of Peace (Fair and Shellman 2008).

As noted above, there have been several polls of Iranians in recent years, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. The World Values Survey included Iran in its 2000 wave, but it did not include questions that addressed the specific policy concerns of interest mentioned above, and it predated the events of September 11 2001 (World Values Survey). The Tarrance Group conducted a survey in May-June 2005 on behalf of the Iran Institute for Democracy between among 758 Iranian adults of voting age. That survey relied upon a call-in technique from a call centre in the United States using random digit dialing (RDD) by callers fluent in Farsi. Similarly, Readers Digest and Zogby International conducted a survey of Iranians with a national random sample of 810 Iranian adults in May 2005 through telephone calls placed from outside Iran, using the RDD method. Gallup also conducted a poll of Iranians in 2001 and 2002. While many of the questions posed by Tarrance, Zogby, and Gallup were germane to our query, they did not include questions about the nuclear (civilian or weapons) program.[5] Terror Free Tomorrow has also conducted several polls in Iran using RDD. The most recent poll of 2009 used RDD from telephones *within* Iran whereas previous efforts used RDD with call centers based outside of Iran (Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Iran before the June 12, 2009 Presidential Elections).

In addition, independent domestic polls within Iran are rarely allowed and government-sponsored polls are often skewed (Sadjadpour 2007). Needless to say, respondent-level data are not available from these polls. Both the past PIPA/SCG poll from 2006 (with USIP) and the current poll uses face-to-face interviews, which does raise the question as to whether or not respondents would participate in a way that produced

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[4] This discussion draws from previous work by Fair and Shellman (2008).
[5] Moreover, all Gallup and Zogby respondent-level data were and are proprietary.

sample bias and whether they would feel free to answer honestly on tendentious or sensitive issues.[6] The lack of freedom of expression has been cited by groups like Terror Free Tomorrow as justification for using RDD over face-to-face interviews.

Notwithstanding these concerns, in general, the survey literature finds that face-to-face interviews are superior to RDD for a number of reasons. First, RDD is relatively more vulnerable to sample bias (due to demographic differences among landline users versus mobile users, population difference between those with phone lines and those who do not have land-lines or mobile phones at all, and an inability to draw a representative sample).[7] Second, research has shown that RDD respondents tend to have higher non-response rates than face-to-face participants (Brogan, Denniston, Liff, Flagg, Coates, and Brinton 2001; Galesic, Tourangeau, and Coupes 2006). Similarly, studies have shown that RDD respondents are more likely than personal interviewees to satisfice (as evidenced by no-opinion responding, non-differentiation, and acquiescence).[8] Experts have also found evidence that RDD respondents tend to be less cooperative and engaged in the interview and more likely to complain about the length of the interview than were face-to-face respondents. This finding held even when the telephonic interview is shorter than those conducted face-to-face. RDD respondents, relative to face-to-face respondents, have also been found to be more suspicious about the interview process and more likely to present themselves in socially desirable ways (Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick 2003).

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[6] There are very serious constraints on freedom of speech in Iran. The Ministry of Culture approves publication of all books and inspects foreign books prior to distribution and there is a Press Court, which has procedural and jurisdictional power to prosecute journalists, editors, and publishers for offensive material, often capriciously determined. See Freedom House (2008) and Human Rights Watch (2008).

[7] The Pew Research Center, in their effort to estimate bias resulting in mobile phone substitution, found that lack of a landlines in the United States is not currently damaging estimates for the entire population. However, they found that evidence that it does create biased estimates on certain variables for young adults, 25 per cent of whom are cell-only according to the most recent government estimate (Keeter, Tompson, and Mokrzycki 2007). Some studies in the United States found that bias accruing from substitution to mobile phones is low for adults as the percentage of adults without landlines is low (Blumberg, Luke, and Cynamon 2006). No comparable studies of Iranian phone usage has been conducted and given the well-known youth bulge and reliance upon mobile phones, sample bias likely remains an issue.

[8] In the context of survey answers, satisficing includes choosing explicitly offered no-opinion response option, selecting responses which are believed to be socially desirable, failing to differentiate among responses when presented with a battery of questions asking for ratings of multiple objects on the same response scale, and manifesting 'acquiescence response bias' by tending to agree with any assertion, regardless of the content offered.

On the other hand, while face-to-face interviews are generally considered to be superior to telephone surveys, a few studies of sensitive topics (e.g. drug and alcohol use, sexual behaviors, religious attendance) and at-risk populations (e.g. drug users, alcoholics) suggest that RDD offers some advantage over face-to-face surveys in that the respondent has a greater sense of anonymity and may be more both inclined to answer the question and to do so more honestly. Other studies of similarly fraught issues found that either face-to-face techniques were superior to RDD or found no difference between the two techniques (Aquilino 1991; Greenfield, Midanik, and Rogers 2002; Midanik, Greenfield, and Rogers 2001; Pridemore, Damphousse, and Moore 2007). Even within various American populations, the relative costs and benefits of (more resource intensive) face-to-face and (comparatively less costly) RDD techniques remain in dispute.

Unfortunately, there are no known studies of the comparative benefits of both techniques in Iran in particular or non-democratic, coercive regimes generally. RDD in Iran is certainly a problem due to sample bias given the increasing mobile usage in the country.[9] In the contexts of Iran, RDD could be more advantageous than face-to-face interviews in part because RDD can be based outside of Iran and need not employ Iranian firms that may self-censor sensitive questions; there are no restrictions on the questions that can be asked. The anonymity afforded by RDD could in principle elicit more honest responses to sensitive questions such as support for nuclear weapons, democracy, beliefs about Israel, etc. However, as noted above, studies fielded in other contexts and countries suggest that RDD does not necessarily elicit better answers even if RDD permits more aggressive questioning in principle. For better or for worse, the PIPA/SCG team employed face-to-face survey techniques.

Data and Methods

In order to test the hypotheses developed in this study and alternative potential explanations, we use an ordered probit regression using data from the 2008 PIPA Iran Survey. Using Gary King's Clarify program

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[9] According to the World Bank, in 2006, there were 31.4 telephone mainlines (per 100 persons) and 19.5 mobile subscribers (per 100 persons). This was a significant increase from 14.8 mainlines (per 100 persons) and 1.5 mobile subscribers (per 100 persons) in 2000 (ITC at a Glance-Iran). This suggests that the gap between land-line and mobile users is closing. In contrast, in the United States in 2006, there were 57 mainlines and 77.9 mobile subscribers per 100 people.

for Monte Carlo simulations, we additionally examine first differences to determine the relative magnitude of the significant independent variables in explaining the variance in our dependent variables. This statistic lets us directly compare which of the significant independent variables has the strongest influence on the dependent variable. The number of respondents in the original sample was 710. We use a sub-sample of that, which has removed the *don't knows/refused* responses from the original sample. This leaves with a sample of 328 respondents for the analysis.

The Dependent Variable

In order to assess Iranian attitudes towards nuclear weapons and policy, we ran a model with a dependent variable based on a question that examines Iranian attitudes toward national nuclear policy. It asks respondents: *Iran's position is that it should have a full fuel cycle nuclear energy program, but shouldn't develop nukes. Do you:* (a) *think Iran shouldn't pursue a full fuel cycle nuclear energy program*, (b) *approve of this program*, and (c) *think Iran should develop nukes*. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of responses for the dependent variable.

Figure 1 about here

What we can gather from these results is that a majority of respondents to both questions are satisfied with the status quo. Over 70% of respondents approve of the current Iranian nuclear policy. We do see, however, that just under a quarter of respondents would like to see Iran expand its nuclear program to include weapons. Given that we are most interested in assessing the differences between those that favor Iran nuclear weapons and those that do not, we combine those respondents that do not support the full fuel cycle nuclear energy program and those that only approve of that program together and code them as 0 for not supporting the development of nuclear weapons. Supporters of nuclear weapons are coded as 1.

The Independent Variables

Given the previous work on Iranian nuclear policy preferences and more general political attitudes toward foreign policy discussed above, we examine several rival explanations within our model.

The first explanatory category, which focuses on the individual's normative predisposition toward nuclear weapons, focuses on citizen attitudes regarding the morality of violence and the perceived legitimacy of developing nuclear weapons. To instrument potential attitudes on the morality of violence, we employ

three survey items from the 2008 PIPA survey. The first variable examines the perceived benefit for Iran to provide weapons to Iraqis to use against American forces. The question specifically asks: *Do you think it would be a good idea or bad idea for Iraq's neighbors to provide weapons to Iraqis fighting US forces in Iraq?* Respondents were asked if they felt it was a good idea (1) or a bad idea (0). Those that believe it is a good idea are predicted to want Iran to possess nuclear weapons as they demonstrate that they believe the use of force is moral. The second and third variables focus on attacking American civilians either in Muslim countries or in the United States. The questions ask: *Thinking about the following kinds of attacks on Americans, please tell me if you approve of them, disapprove of them, or have mixed feelings about them?* The respondent is offered the scenarios: *Attacks on US civilians working for US companies in Islamic countries* and *Attacks on civilians in the United States.* The response categories are: Strongly approve, somewhat approve, mixed feelings, somewhat disapprove, strongly disapprove. Based on the argument about how the morality of violence will condition views on nuclear weapons, those who approve of attacks on American civilians in Islamic countries or in the United States, are more likely to approve of the development of nuclear weapons.

The normative argument about the legitimacy of nuclear weapons conditioning support for their development is instrumentalized by the following question in the survey. The question asks: *Is it your opinion that producing nuclear weapons is or is not against the principles of Islam?* The response categories offered are: *Yes, producing nuclear weapons is against the principles of Islam, no Islam does not prohibit the production of nuclear weapons, Islam does not have a position on nuclear weapons (voluntary)*, and *Islam requires Muslims to pursue nuclear weapons (voluntary).* Those who believe that Islam does not prohibit the production of nuclear weapons are more likely to support the development of nuclear weapons.

The second category of explanation focuses on an individual's level of trust in other countries. Those Iranians who view other countries as threats will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons. We utilize several measures to test this argument. One of those measures explores the treat the United States poses to Islam, the religion of the vast majority of Iranians. To measure this within our analysis, we utilize the following question: *Which point of view is closer to yours? The US mostly shows respect to the Islamic world* (0)*, The US is mostly disrespectful to the Islamic world, but out of ignorance and insensitivity* (1)*, or The US*

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purposely tries to humiliate the Islamic world (2)? Respondents that believe the US aims to humiliate Islam are hypothesized to be more likely to want Iran to possess nuclear weapons.

We also use measures that relate to physical threats to Iran. To assess these values in our sample, we use four different survey questions. The first variable asks: *How likely do you think it is that the United States will take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities in the next year or two*? Respondents could answer *not at all likely* (0), *not very likely* (1), *somewhat likely* (2), and *very likely* (3). Those that believe the U.S. will attack are expected to be more likely to want nuclear weapons. Such an argument is bolstered by the fact that the U.S. invaded nuclear-free Iraq but not nuclear-weapon possessing North Korea; hence, it appears that nuclear weapons are a deterrent. A second measure looks at the perception Iranian citizens have of other nations potentially having secret nuclear programs. The question asks: *How many countries do you think have secret programs for developing capacity to produce nukes*? Respondents are presented with the following responses: *none* (0), *a few* (1), *some* (2), and *many* (3). Given that many potential nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states are defecting from the NPT, the assumption is that individuals that perceive of many secret nuclear regimes in the world would want Iran to also have nuclear weapons. The third measure examines the perceived threat posed to Iran by the U.S. having military bases in the Middle East. The question specifically asks: *How much, if at all, do you think U.S. bases in the Middle East are a threat to Iran*? Respondents were given the options of: *not at all a threat* (0), *a minor threat* (1), *some threat* (2), and *a major threat* (3). Those that see U.S. military bases as a major threat are expected to want Iran to possess nuclear weapons. We also include a variable that measures Iranian views on what the principles of Iranian foreign policy should be. The question that instrumentalizes this asks: *Which is the more important principle for Iranian foreign policy?* The following response categories are offered: *Iran should use its power and influence in the way that best serves Iran's interests and values* and *Iran should coordinate its power and influence together with other countries according to shared ideas of what is best for the world as a whole.* Based on the logic of the international trust category of explanation, those individuals are trusting of other countries would tend to choose the second response option. Those who distrust other countries would tend to not want to coordinate with other countries and work to make world a better place together. Thus, the distrustful

Iranians would choose the first response category. Those who choose that response category are more likely to support the development of nuclear weapons in Iran.

Our final measure of international trust uses an individual's level of education. The question asks: *Please tell me what is the highest class in school you have completed.* Respondents were given the options of: *Less than primary* (0), *primary* (1), *less than high school diploma* (2), *high school diploma* (3), *some college/university* (4), *bachelor's degree or higher* (5). Iranians with less education are expected to be more supportive of nuclear weapons.

Our third category of explanation focuses on an individual's level of trust in her government to determine her likelihood of supporting the development of nuclear weapons in her country. We posit that the more trust an individual has in her government, the more likely she is to support the development of nuclear weapons by that government. We use the following question from the survey to instrumentalize this: *How much of the time do you think you can trust the national government in Tehran to do what is right?* The response choices offered are: *Most of the time, some of the time, rarely,* and *never.* Those who think the government in Tehran can be trusted most of the time will be more likely to support the development of nuclear weapons.

In addition to these independent variables suggested by our three categories, we include controls for four variables as part of our models. Income is asked of survey respondents and then recoded and scaled to: *very low* (0), *low* (1), *average/median* (2), *high* (3), and *very high* (4). Given the previously discussed concerns of sampling in Iran, we include controls for location. We dummy code respondents than live in Tehran (1) compared to any other region of the country (0). Given Ahmadinejad's time as mayor of the city and the fact that Tehran residents are more exposed to politics, it is important to control for these potential differences. The control for age is broken into four categories: *25 and under* (0), *26-35 years old* (1), *36-50 years old* (2), and *51 and over* (3). Lastly, we control for gender with *men* coded as 1 and *women* coded as 0. Table 1 summarizes our hypotheses and their corresponding operationalizations.

Table 1 about here

Results of the Analysis

The ordered probit analysis results for our model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

We find support for three of four categories of explanation: international trust, normative considerations, and government trust. The international trust category proved to be a rich source of explanation. This argument produces two significant variables (out of four). At the .01 level of significance, we find that Iranians that believe there are a large number of secret nuclear programs in the world are more likely to want their nation to also adopt nuclear weapons. Education fares better and is significant at the .05 level. Confirming our hypothesis, the results indicate that less educated respondents are more in favor of Iran developing nuclear weapons. Our results indicate that fears of US bases in the Middle East, fears of a US attack on nuclear sites in Iran, the US seeking to humiliate Islam, and views on Iran cooperating with other countries did not prove to be significant predictors of support for the development of nuclear weapons in Iran.

The normative explanation, which included four variables in our analysis, also proved to be a useful means of predicting support for the development of nuclear weapons in Iran. We find that norms about the use of violence did not prove to be predictive of support for the development of nuclear weapons. The variables that focus on providing weapons to Iraqis fighting Americans, the morality of attacking US civilians working in Muslim countries, and the morality of attacking US civilians in the United States did not yield statistically significant results. On the other hand, the question that asked the respondent if the development of nuclear weapons was in line with or opposed by Islam did yield a significant coefficient. As predicted, those Iranians who believe that Islam prohibits the development of nuclear weapons were more likely to oppose the Iranian government developing such weapons.

The government trust explanation also yielded a significant statistical result. The trust in the Iranian government variable was significant and in the predicted direction. In other words, those Iranians who have greater levels of trust in the national government to do the right thing were more likely to support the development of nuclear weapons.

Two of our control variables emerged as significant predictors. We find that women and younger Iranians are more likely to want Iran to move toward developing nuclear weapons. Income and residency in Tehran did not prove to be significant predictors.

Given that we use ordered logit, the coefficients reported in Table 2 do not represent the marginal effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables. As a result, we report the first differences of our significant independent variables in Table 2 as well. The first difference reported measures the probability of the dependent variable signifying a desire to see Iran move toward developing nuclear weapons when the independent variable of interest moving from its minimum to its maximum value while all remaining independent variables are held at their means. This allows us to consider the substantive significance of each independent variable to explaining variation in the dependent variable. When looking at the model, we see that the perceived acceptance of Islam of the development of nuclear weapons proved to have the largest first difference-.315. That means that increasing the value of this variable from its minimum to maximum while holding all other variables constant creates a 31.5% increase in the probability that the respondent would want Iran to develop nuclear weapons. Education, another significant predictor, has a first difference of .257 Based on these results, it appears that education has the second greatest effect on determining whether an individual wants Iran to adjust its nuclear policy to include the development of nuclear weapons. The variable that measured an Iranians views on the likelihood of other countries developing secret nuclear programs produced a first difference of .183, making it the third most predictive variable in the analysis. Trust in the government in Tehran was out fourth most predictive of our explanatory variables, with a first difference of .118. Of our significant control variables, age and gender, gender produced a first difference of .155 and age produced a first difference of .150.

Conclusions

This essay analyzed what the Iranian mass public believes about Iran potentially developing nuclear weapons. Moreover, in some measure, it explained how and why Iranians differ on these matters. We developed and tested a set of hypotheses drawn from three models of the core values that could shape demand for nuclear weapons.

The results of our analysis proved very instructive. When it comes to the issue of developing a full nuclear power cycle, a clear majority of Iranians support their government's position that it is Iran's right to

do so. A significant minority or Iranians are willing to state that they would like their country to go further and develop nuclear weapons. This set of findings, which corresponds well to previous opinion research on Iran, shows that there is a strong basis of support for the Iranian government's assertive position on the nuclear issue.

This is important for understanding Iranian foreign policy, at least in the near term. It means that there is little down-side for the Iranian government in taking this assertive nuclear posture, at least in terms of domestic politics. In fact, this posture may be a significant means of bolstering support for the Ahmadinejad government. If the mass public is enthusiastic about the idea of Iran pressing forward with the full nuclear cycle and even developing nuclear weapons, the Iranian government has a strong incentive to do so. This is particularly true if the international community cannot produce sanctions that tip the cost-benefit calculus in the opposite direction for the Iranian government. As we know from multiple examples around the world, governments will often use foreign policy issues that they know will generate support from their populace to distract that populace from domestic problems or weaknesses in the government. While public opinion is likely not driving the Iranian government on the issue of developing nuclear weapons, it is likely bolstering the intransigence of the Iranian government in cooperating with some other countries' in their call that Iran halt its nuclear program.

The results of our analysis of the factors that are driving some Iranians to support the idea of Iran developing nuclear weapons indicate that the normative explanation proved most predictive of Iranian views on developing nuclear weapons. Specifically, the perception of the legitimacy of developing nuclear weapons in Islam is the most important factor shaping support for this policy option.

International trust proved to the second most important explanation of the distribution of views on developing nuclear weapons in Iran. The most important variable that was operationalized within this category of explanation is an individual's level of education. This indicates that the less educated Iranians are the strongest proponents of the development of nuclear weapons. We have argued that this is likely due to less educated Iranians being more distrustful of the outside world. Thus, nuclear weapons may be seen as a way to increase security for people who expect the worst from Iran's potential adversaries.

We also found that those who believe there are countries with secret nuclear programs are more likely to support Iran's development of nuclear weapons. This is also an operationalization of the international trust core foreign policy value. The results show that Iranians who believe that there are nations with secret nuclear programs are more supportive of the idea of Iran developing its own nuclear weapons than those Iranians who do not believe other countries have secret nuclear programs. This is a fairly clear indication that one's level of international trust is a major factor conditioning whether one wants her country to develop nuclear weapons. Thus, the demand for nuclear weapons, at least at the level of the mass public, is driven largely by the willingness to trust or not trust other countries.

We also find that trust in the government in Tehran conditions support for the development of nuclear weapons. Those Iranians who trust the national government to do the right thing most of the time are more willing to trust that government with developing nuclear weapons.

Perhaps just as important as finding what drives the demand for nuclear weapons is finding what does not condition that demand. The results of this study indicate no support for the hypothesis that the core value of the morality of violence conditions attitudes toward nuclear weapons. Also, the study finds that an Iranian's distrust of the US, namely the idea that the US is out to humiliate Islam, its bases in the Middle East, or that the US may attack Iran's nuclear sites, does not condition support for the development of nuclear weapons. This finding is particularly important because it seems to indicate the Iranian public may not view the United States as great a threat as the Iranian regime does.

Overall, what type of a picture does this analysis paint of Iranian mass public views on nuclear weapons? A very important point to make from the results is they seem to indicate that very general respondent predispositions seem to drive a great deal of the variation we see among Iranian responses to the survey items. The fact that levels of education proved to be such an important predictor of support for a nuclear weapons program and that there was little reference to Iran's tangible external security threats, such as US bases in the Mideast or fears of a US attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, indicate the Iranian mass public, like just about any other mass public, uses very general cues to determine the stances they take on foreign policy issues.

What implications do these findings have for the policies of countries trying to halt Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program? The findings of this study seem to offer cause for some pessimism that the Iranian government can be budged from its present intransigence on its nuclear program, at least by using Iranian public opinion to accomplish that. The reasons for this pessimism are twofold. First, Iranians, in large numbers, support the government's policy stance on developing nuclear energy, despite threats of sanctions and the possibility of attacks from Israel or the United States. Second, if the basis of support is founded on very general predispositions that have little to do with the realities of power politics in the region or the world, it may be difficult for the outside world to sway the Iranian public to pressure its government to alter its nuclear policy stance. Thus, many of the efforts by the United States and others to drive Iranian public opinion against its government on this issue may be for naught.
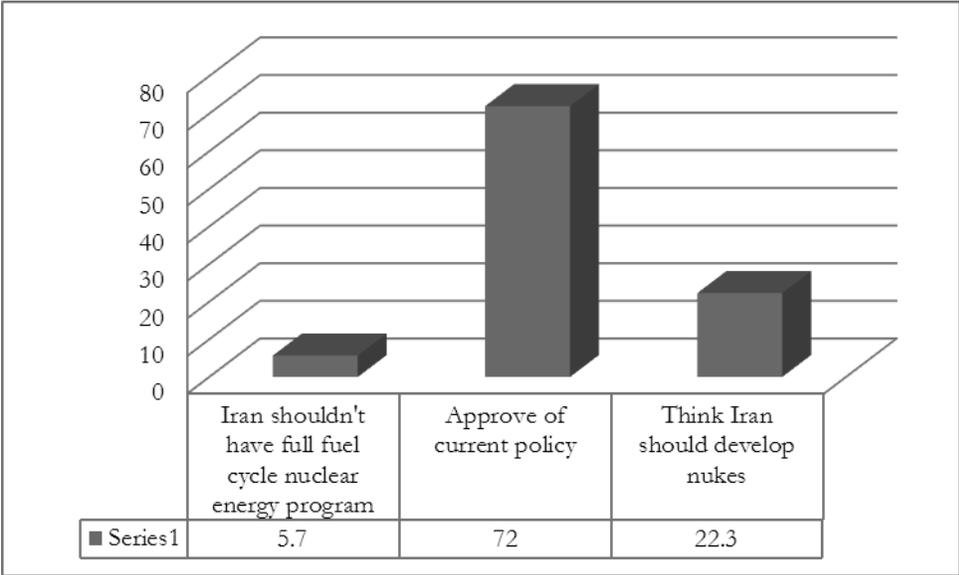
Figure 1: Iranian Nuclear Policy Preferences

	Iran shouldn't have full fuel cycle nuclear energy program	Approve of current policy	Think Iran should develop nukes
■ Series1	5.7	72	22.3

Table 1. Hypothesis Table

Hypotheses	Independent Variables
H(1): Iranians who are convinced that the use of force is moral will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	1) Do you think it would be a good idea or bad idea for Iran's neighbors to provide weapons to Iraqis fighting US forces in Iraq? good idea (1) or bad idea (0) 2-3) Thinking about the following kinds of attacks on Americans, please tell me if you approve of them, disapprove of them, or have mixed feelings about them? Attacks on US civilians working for US companies in Islamic countries and Attacks on civilians in the United States. strongly disapprove (0), somewhat disapprove (1), mixed feelings (2), somewhat approve (3), strongly approve (4)
H(2): Iranians who are convinced that their morality permits the creation of nuclear weapons will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	Is it your opinion that producing nuclear weapons is or is not against the principles of Islam? is not (0), Islam has no position on WMDs (1), is (2)
H(3): Those Iranians who view other countries as threats will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	1) Which point of view is closer to yours? The US mostly shows respect to the Islamic world (0), The US is mostly disrespectful to the Islamic world, but out of ignorance and insensitivity (1), or The US purposely tries to humiliate the Islamic world (2)? 2) How likely do you think it is that the United States will take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities in the next year or two? not at all (0), not very (1), somewhat (2), or very (3). 3) How many countries do you think have secret programs for developing capacity to produce nukes? none (0), a few (1), some (2), and many (3). 4) How much, if at all, do you think U.S. bases in the Middle East are a threat to Iran? not at all a threat (0), a minor threat (1), some threat (2), and a major threat (3). 5) Which is the more important principle for Iranian foreign policy? Iran should use its power and influence in the way that best serves Iran's interests and values (1) or Iran should coordinate its power and influence together with other countries according to shared ideas of what is best for the world as a whole (0)
H(4): Iranians who have lower levels of educational attainment will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	Please tell me what is the highest class in school you have completed. less than primary (0), primary (1), less than high school diploma (2), high school diploma (3), some college/university (4), bachelor's

	degree or higher (5).
H(5): Iranians who have higher levels of trust in their government will be more likely to support developing nuclear weapons.	How much of the time do you think you can trust the national government in Tehran to do what is right? most of the time (3), some of the time (2), rarely (1), or never (0)

Table 2:

Dependent Variable-Iranian Nuclear Weapons Preference

Independent Variables	Coef.	S.E.	First Difference
Provide Weapons to Iraq	.045	.350	
Attack U.S. Employees	.256	.139	
Attack U.S. Citizens	-.373	.195	
Nukes Against Religion	-1.021***	.182	.315
U.S. Humiliates Islam	-.028	.292	
U.S. Attack Nuclear Facilities	.048	.350	
Secret Nuclear Programs	.624***	.213	.183
U.S. Base Threat	.077	.167	
Iran Focus	.123	.335	
Education	-.396**	.155	.257
Trust National Government	.478*	.242	.118
Income	-.294	.198	
Tehran Resident	.746	.401	
Age	-.511**	.191	
Gender	-1.220***	.339	
Cut 1	.427	1.044	
N	328		
LR chi2(15)	74.12		
Prob > chi2	.0000		

Note: Figures are unstandardized coefficients shown alongside standard errors. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01. Cut 1 refers to a "cut-point" on a standardized normal distribution. Cut points are used to calculated the predicted probabilities for each category of the dependent variable. The constant of the model would be interpreted as the inverse of Cut 1 (-.427).

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