Divisions at Home, Broken Promises Abroad?

How Domestic Politics Shapes the United States' Nuclear Credibility

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Abstract

How will the intensifying political dysfunction in the United States affect Washington's nuclear credibility? Although the implications of U.S. domestic politics often extend past American borders, few studies examine how foreign publics assess the U.S. political environment. In the nuclear security domain, where the United States must maintain challenging extended deterrence commitments, domestic political conditions have especially destabilizing potential. Drawing on a novel, cross-national survey experiment, we test how four defining characteristics of U.S. policymaking—political party, presidential partisanship, polarization, and divided government—affect foreign publics' evaluations of U.S. nuclear credibility. We find little evidence that party stereotypes meaningfully inform such perceptions, but our other measures of political dysfunction lower favorability towards the U.S. government and decrease confidence in U.S. deterrence. Domestic divisions could pose significant risks to the United States' international standing in the security domain, and these risks could persist even when party control changes.

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1 Introduction

Washington's ability to protect its allies from nuclear attacks—and reassure them that it would do so—is a crucial tenet for maintaining peace and preventing nuclear proliferation. Accordingly, an extensive body of work evaluates both the technical and political credibility of U.S. extended deterrence commitments. Most scholarship argues credibility is a function of two key characteristics: a state's capability to follow through on its promises and its resolve to do so. Understudied in this literature, however, is the role played by a state's domestic political conditions. Yet credibility relies, at least in part, on effective domestic policymaking processes that can facilitate consistent, decisive responses to foreign crises (Fabbrini 2010; Friedrichs 2025; Schultz 2017).

In recent years, scholars and pundits alike have warned that institutional divisions have sown political dysfunction across the country. Democratic and Republican legislators vote together less often, cosponsor bills less often, and even socially interact less often (Dietrich 2021; Jacobson 2013; Neal 2020; Rippere 2016; Gelman and Wilson 2022; Andris et al. 2015). In a more literal sense, divided government, wherein the president's party does not control at least one of Congress' chambers, has become more common (Lacy et al. 2019). This produces a political system that increasingly requires cross-party agreement to pass bills, or enables presidents to use unilateral powers to circumvent Congress, at a time when ideological disagreement between the two parties has perhaps never been higher (Theriault 2008; McCarty et al. 2006; Andris et al. 2015). Despite the longstanding belief that foreign policymaking is insulated from domestic affairs, recent studies suggest this boundary has become more porous over time; foreign policy votes and preferences are increasingly polarized and partisan (Jeong and Quirk 2019; Smeltz 2022; Friedrichs 2025; Sinclair 2006) even in the face of external threats (Myrick 2021; Yeung and Xu 2025).

Disrupted, divisive policymaking has eroded the American public's trust in government and dampened evaluations of party performance (Uslaner 2015; Hetherington 1998; Hetherington and Rudolph 2017; Harbridge, Malhotra, and Harrison 2014; Flynn and Harbridge 2016). Yet few studies have examined the impacts of these domestic trends on

foreign attitudes. These factors should be—and, we argue, are—understood by foreign audiences as important elements of U.S. credibility. Foreign perceptions of an ally's credibility should be influenced by whether its domestic political conditions appear to aid or degrade its policymaking processes.

In this paper, we examine how domestic political conditions in the United States shape foreign publics' perceptions of U.S. credibility. In particular, we focus on the U.S. reputation in the nuclear domain, where Washington plays an outsized role and where the consequences of failing to deter and reassure are particularly significant. With U.S. nuclear security guarantees and assurances at the heart of the existing global order—from the U.S. role in NATO to nuclear security assurances to Taiwan—understanding how foreign audiences evaluate the credibility of U.S. commitments is crucial.

First, extended deterrence entails the U.S. government making challenging and inherently difficult-to-believe commitments (Friedrichs 2025; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012). Assessments of the U.S. nuclear reputation may operate differently than other types of reputation where partners can point to a concrete record of behavior. Second, the United States is an essential leader in the nuclear domain, and the nuclear order could destabilize if its leadership falters (Gibbons 2022).[1] Third, because nuclear policy operates at the highest levels of government, this may present a hard test case. As a domain with dire security implications, nuclear politics should be a "most likely" case to benefit from bipartisan consensus and immunity from domestic political trends. If domestic political conditions can sway foreign public's confidence in U.S. extended deterrence—when the president ultimately has unilateral power over nuclear weapons use—this suggests the effects of the domestic political environment on foreign perceptions are indeed quite powerful. Finally, while previous scholarship identifies several ways in which nuclear policy decisions are subject to domestic constraints, there is a dearth of work on the effects of domestic politics on the U.S. nuclear reputation abroad.[2]

1. Nuclear reassurance can fail in many ways, but scholars agree the consequences could be dire (Bleek and Lorber 2014; Lanoszka 2018; Sukin 2020).

2. For a discussion of the domestic-political determinants of "nuclear choices," see: (Saunders 2019). Aside from questions of reputation, important scholarship has investigated how U.S. domestic politics influences the *outcomes* of U.S. nuclear policy, such as Kreps, Saunders, and Schultz (2018) and Delaet and Scott (2006) on arms control and Lim (2017) and Jasper (1990) on U.S. nuclear energy policy.

This paper proceeds as follows. We first review the literature on how U.S. domestic political conditions shape foreign policymaking. We then take lessons from this scholarship to inform new hypotheses about how different characteristics of the U.S. domestic policymaking environment will affect the U.S. reputation abroad. Next, we introduce a novel survey experiment fielded in the United States and four U.S. allies and partners—Australia, India, Israel, and the United Kingdom—that tests how domestic institutional features affect perceptions of U.S. nuclear credibility. We conclude by discussing our results, which highlight the negative effect of domestic political divisions on foreign reputation.

2 How Domestic Politics Shapes Foreign Policy

Political science has traditionally perceived U.S. action in foreign affairs to be distinct and relatively insulated from domestic politics (often called the "two presidencies" or "dual presidencies" theory). Research suggests the president enjoys greater public support and congressional deference over foreign policy compared to domestic policy (Leloup and Shull 1979; F. P. Lee 1980; Fleisher and Bond 1988; Canes-Wrone, Howell, and Lewis 2008; Wildavsky 1966; Hinckley 1994), due to opinion leadership (Meernik and Ault 2001) and stronger claims to constitutional authority (Ramsey 2007). Indeed, even amid growing polarization on domestic issues, foreign policy has been thought to benefit from bipartisan consensus and the tendency to "rally round" the president during military conflicts (Wildavsky 1966; Canes-Wrone 2005; Jost and Kertzer 2024).

This apparent separation of foreign and domestic affairs suggests domestic political conditions should not substantially affect policymaking abroad. However, recent studies show politics may no longer stop at the water's edge (Jeong and Quirk 2019; Kupchan and Trubowitz 2010; Busby and Monten 2008; Smeltz 2022). The growing ideological distance in foreign policy opinions between Democrats and Republicans, paired with the growing ideological homogeneity within each party, has also led to more partisan congressional voting behavior on foreign policy issues (Souva and Rohde 2007; Sinclair 2006). Spillover

effects from domestic political conditions may partially explain polarization in foreign policymaking (Trubowitz and Mellow 2011).

Domestic political dysfunction can disrupt both the process and output of U.S. policymaking. Struggles to overcome divisive internal politics hamper Congress' ability to influence foreign policy, while also increasing incentives for the opposition party to strategically undermine the president's foreign policy agenda (Marshall 2017; Sinclair 2006). Anticipations of an obstructive or inefficient Congress, especially during divided government, can prompt presidents to use unilateral action (Kaufman and Rogowski 2024), which Friedrichs and Tama (2022) argue negatively impacts Washington's international standing. Other features of domestic politics—from the individual characteristics of leaders to a country's regime type—matter for various foreign policy outcomes.[3]

That domestic politics affects foreign policy outcomes suggests it should also have an important role in shaping reputation. Understanding the determinants of reputation is important; for example, foreign attitudes about the United States shape the strength and character of U.S. alliances.[4] Three major studies have examined the reputational consequences of polarization for U.S. alliances. Schultz (2017) theorizes polarization impacts allies' perceptions of U.S. credibility by raising doubts about the longevity and coherence of U.S. foreign policy strategies. One explanation is that high polarization leads allies expect substantial policy change between administrations when party control shifts, which reduces their willingness to make long-term plans that require consistent U.S. defense commitments (Schultz 2017). Providing support for Schultz's arguments, Myrick (2022) shows high polarization makes the U.K. public less likely to perceive the United States as a reliable future partner or a global leader. Looking at Japan, Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2023) show concerns about U.S. domestic politics can influence the U.S. reputation for resolve. Information about successful Russian interference in the 2016

3. On the role of leaders, see: Agadjanian and Horiuchi (2020), Saunders (2011), Horowitz and Starn (2014), and Byman and Pollack (2001). On democratic vs. autocratic institutions, see: Koch and Cranmer (2007), Mesquita and Lalman (1992), and Schultz (1999). On public diplomacy in foreign policy, see: Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2009), Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Matush (2021), and Mor (2006). On leaders and reputation for resolve, see: McManus (2024).

4. Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2012) use data from 58 countries to show foreign public opinion of the United States shapes policy behavior.

election reduced the Japanese public's belief that the United States could effectively defend Japan (Goldsmith and Horiuchi 2023). These papers provide valuable evidence that allies are attentive to the constraints and challenges of U.S. domestic politics.

Our study makes four key contributions to this important literature. First, we provide new insight into the credibility of U.S. alliance commitments. The few studies of how U.S. domestic politics impact foreign public opinion test a single characteristic: polarization. Instead, our study leverages a multidimensional operationalization of domestic institutional dysfunction. We concurrently test four different institutional sources of domestic divisions: polarization, partisanship, political party, and divided government. Each could significantly impact U.S. foreign policymaking dynamics.

Second, the generalizability of previous studies may be limited by their focus on U.S. public opinion and that of a few major allies. Yet we may expect publics in countries with stronger ties to the United States, less pronounced threats, or significant political divisions to hold opinions that are less sensitive to U.S. domestic politics. By measuring public opinion in five countries, we paint a uniquely comprehensive picture of the domestic determinants of foreign attitudes.

Third, we offer temporal diversity. Our study captures contemporary attitudes toward the U.S., thereby building on earlier attitudinal work that is often clustered around specific, salient events, such as the U.S. military response to 9/11 Holsti (2008) and Brooks (2006), and the 2016 election and presidency of Donald Trump (Agadjanian and Horiuchi 2020; Goldsmith and Horiuchi 2023). Since 2016, the Republican Party has undergone significant changes in its foreign policy ideals. This shift has widened the gap between Republican and Democratic policies, creating new dimensions along which partisan disagreement plays out. This necessitates new scholarship.

Fourth, the small extant literature has focused on U.S. reputation broadly. However, we argue that domestic considerations should not only affect wide-lens views on the favorability of the United States or its general reputation for action, but should have concrete effects on its policymaking in specific domains. As such, we measure attitudes toward U.S. nuclear credibility, as this high-risk and niche domain should be a "least

likely" case for domestic influence.

3 Theoretical Expectations

Communicating credibility requires a complex balance of signaling. On the one hand, U.S. allies and partners may favor a U.S. political environment that facilitates decisive, prompt policy responses to crises; on the other hand, this may not be preferred if it comes at the expense of adequately scrutinizing these high-stakes decisions. In this section, we assess which domestic political conditions might be conducive to scrutiny or might enable speedy decision-making; moreover, we describe why these policymaking traits might be desirable.

The *speed* approach posits the U.S. government's ability to take swift action against security threats is a major determinant of its nuclear reputation. Allied and partner countries may respond unfavorably to U.S. domestic political conditions that prompt concerns that Washington would be slower or less likely to pursue military efforts. Certain political conditions could limit the cohesive political support for and sustained pressure on government to defend its allies, leading to less hawkish policies. Thus, domestic environments that appear to constrain the U.S. government's capacity to defend allies or signal resolve to adversaries could harm the U.S. reputation.

Conversely, the *scrutiny* approach posits the U.S. government's ability to credibly signal commitment to upholding its policy promises partially depends on its checks and balances being perceived as a robust counterweight to rash decision-making. The perceived need for scrutiny may be greater in high-stakes issue areas, such as nuclear security. From this point of view, political environments that allow for greater bipartisan cooperation or lead to more moderate policy outcomes may be preferable, even if this counterbalances the hawkish tendencies that make rapid intervention more likely.

In this section, we outline competing hypotheses for how four institutional characteristics—political party, partisanship, polarization, and divided government—could shape perceptions of U.S. nuclear credibility. We argue that whether foreign audiences prefer a U.S.

government that maximizes on speed or scrutiny should affect ideas about how a U.S. domestic politics should ideally operate.

3.1 Party Control of the Executive and Legislative Branches

To make credible nuclear security commitments, the United States must signal resolve to adversaries and reassure its allies of its capacity and willingness to protect them. Partisan stereotypes—the use of political party as an informational heuristic for how political actors will behave—may factor into strategic calculations about engaging with the United States (Clark, Fordham, and Nordstrom 2011; Prins 2001; Koch and Cranmer 2007; Lupton 2020). As such, we hypothesize foreign public opinion about the credibility of U.S. nuclear security commitments will be responsive to which political party controls the executive and legislative branches.

One longstanding partisan stereotype is that Democrats tend to pursue more peaceful foreign policy strategies than Republicans, including in the nuclear domain (Clark, Fordham, and Nordstrom 2011; Kupchan and Trubowitz 2007; Kreps, Saunders, and Schultz 2018). Democratic voters also exhibit this partisan difference. For example, liberal Americans tend to hold more negative views of nuclear weapons (Baron and Herzog 2020; Ripberger, Rabovsky, and Herron 2011). Given the dovish ideological commitments of the party and the potentially high political cost that their similarly dovish voters would levy on them should they fail to uphold those ideals (Clark, Fordham, and Nordstrom 2011), foreign publics that prioritize speed over scrutiny may anticipate that the United States' ability to uphold its nuclear security commitments is uniquely constrained when Democrats are in office. This dynamic informs our first set of hypotheses:

> **H1A:** If the U.S. president is a Democrat, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *decrease*.
>
> **H1B:** If Democrats hold the majority of the seats in the U.S. Congress, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *decrease*.

While this dovish stereotype could cause misalignment between Democrats and allies

that prefer the U.S. to hold hawkish policies in order to enhance the chances of intervention, it could increase the confidence of those who instead prefer a more moderate and cautious Washington. Indeed, in a survey experiment fielded in the Netherlands, Etienne (2022) finds that Democrats' desire to use nuclear weapons is seen as more "responsible" than an equivalent preference expressed by a Republican; that is, Democrats are trusted to make more appropriate nuclear decisions.

Another partisan stereotype that foreign audiences may consider involves the isolationist-internationalist distinction. Democrats have traditionally been perceived as more internationalist than Republicans (Rieselbach 1960). This partisan difference may be heightened in this era of Republican "America First" branding, which promotes U.S. isolation and unilateralism (Dodson and Brooks 2022; Kupchan and Trubowitz 2021). We hypothesize Democrats' growing reputation for being more amenable to international cooperation than their Republican counterparts could induce an effect in the opposite direction of H1A and H1B. A perceived internationalist orientation could increase allies' and partners' confidence in the United States' approach to alliance commitments by signaling U.S. willingness to cooperate with partners. We would therefore expect the following relationships:

> **H2A:** If the U.S. president is a Democrat, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *increase*.

> **H2B:** If Democrats hold the majority of the seats in the U.S. Congress, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *increase*.

3.2 Partisanship in the Executive Branch

Partisanship indicates the extremity of a politician's beliefs. Although there is a paucity of studies on foreign public opinion on partisanship, research on the American public has shown people anticipate partisanship to matter in policymaking (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001; Paris 2017). Partisan leaders may have more maneuverability in policy choices. Because highly partisan leaders are accountable to a smaller segment of

their electorate, they do not have to "race to the middle" by selecting moderate policies. Indeed, loyal partisans may reward—rather than punish—leaders who choose extreme policies (Carson et al. 2010; Dancey and Sheagley 2018; Richardson and Milyo 2016). This may be a boon for allies and partners if it allows leaders to act quickly in urgent situations, even against naysayers from the other side of the political aisle. This suggests:

> **H3A:** If the U.S. president is partisan, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *increase*.

On the other hand, partisan leaders may be perceived as beholden to adverse domestic interests of co-partisans. This could concern allies and partners, as a partisan White House may prioritize policies that align with domestic interests, even when those do not align with allies' interests. Bäcker-Peral and Park (2024) suggests "ideological polarization could reduce domestic political costs for reneging or weakening commitment mechanisms" because the president can leverage the support of loyal co-partisans to pursue their preferred policy agenda (F. E. Lee 2015; Bäcker-Peral and Park 2024). Thus, allies could negatively associate partisan politics with undermined scrutiny. Moreover, a highly partisan Congress is associated with fewer bill passages, greater political incivility, and more ideologically extreme legislation (Paris 2017; Harbridge and Malhotra 2011; Harbridge, Malhotra, and Harrison 2014), leading to less effective and less moderate policymaking. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

> **H3B:** If the U.S. president is partisan, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *decrease*.

3.3 Divided Government

Understanding how divided government is perceived abroad is of particular importance, as divided government is an increasingly common feature of the U.S. political landscape: 20 out of the 30 Congresses that have convened between 1969 and 2025 operated within a divided government (Lacy et al. 2019).

In divided government, the balance of power between parties has been traditionally theorized to incentivize bipartisan cooperation (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995, 1996). In the traditional model, under divided government, the president's party must win support from the other party to successfully implement its policies, meaning divided government provides an important check against ideologically extreme or excessive policymaking by pulling bills toward the ideological center (Cohen 2011). This policymaking dynamic may be favored by allies and partners with a preference for scrutiny, as it may lead to more moderate policies, involve more perspectives in the decision-making processes, and can facilitate greater procedural legitimacy (Fabbrini 2010). We might therefore expect the following:

> **H4A:** If there is divided government, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *increase*.

However, divided government has downsides. The United States' system of checks and balances ideally facilitates an appropriate level of scrutiny, but it increasingly does not. Instead, to circumvent heightened political constraints in divided government, presidents tend to issue considerably more unilateral directives (Kaufman and Rogowski 2024). Presidents wielding unilateral powers can act more quickly and may be more likely to take rash and highly partisan actions; in the security domain, unilateral powers have often enabled military action without presidents being circumspect to the slow process of Congressional approval. From this perspective, those who prefer scrutiny may actually oppose divided government in the modern era.

Those who prefer speed may also oppose divided government. Unified government has been likened to a "blank check" to pursue the ruling party's policy agenda (Bean and Wattenberg 1998). This could enable speedier decision-making by reducing political roadblocks. Howell and Pevehouse (2005) explain presidents are more likely to use force abroad when leading a unified government, as they are less deterred by potential congressional opposition. Marshall and Prins (2011) explains this is because presidents anticipate opposition to the use of force under divided government and may be unwilling to spend political capital on foreign policy goals. Furthermore, divided government can

slow policymaking by creating gridlock and making the legislative process more cumbersome (Binder 1999; Repetto and Andrés 2023; Marshall 2017).

Only a small percentage of Americans prefer divided government over unified government (Lacy et al. 2019). One explanation is that the public dislikes administrations where bill passages are few and party conflict is high (Flynn and Harbridge 2016; Ramirez 2009; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001)—two outcomes often associated with divided government. Foreign publics may feel similarly. Allies and partners may be averse to lagged policymaking under divided government and may worry that divided government enables rash decision-making by encouraging the use of unilateral presidential powers. Thus, in both the speed and scrutiny models, we could expect:

> **H4B:** If there is divided government, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *decrease*.

3.4 Polarization

Polarization is a defining characteristic of contemporary U.S. politics (Jacobson 2013).[5] Polarization can affect politics in many ways. It may undermine public cohesion and reduce accountability by heightening the salience of partisan differences so that "voters prioritize ideology over integrity" (Hajnal 2025) when forming opinions and evaluating the government (Jin et al. 2023; Brown, Touchton, and Whitford 2011; Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler 2017). Mass polarization may also shape elite polarization (Jacob, Lee, and Gratton 2024; Jacobson 2012), with reelection-minded politicians responding to an electorate that has ideologically sorted (Levendusky 2009; Abramowitz 2010; Hetherington, Long, and Rudolph 2016).

A polarized Congress can facilitate an imperial presidency by providing the president with "the incentive and an excuse for circumventing Congress and governing by executive

5. Our study includes the following description: "Recently, polarization in the United States has been high, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are very different. At other times, polarization has been low, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are more similar." This definition refers to issue-based polarization (Theriault 2008; McCarty et al. 2006) and differs from affective polarization, which refers to growing animosity toward outgroup partisans (Iyengar et al. 2019; Enders and Armaly 2019).

order" (McCarty 2007). Polarization thus reduces the level of public and Congressional constraint on presidents. This could have a positive effect on the credibility of U.S. nuclear security commitments among foreign publics if a relatively unconstrained president is able to enact hawkish policies to more swiftly defend allies and partners. In this case, we might expect:

> **H5A:** As polarization in the U.S. public increases, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *increase*.

However, polarization could hamper confidence in the United States if allies and partners value the role that the U.S. electorate plays in scrutinizing U.S. government policy. High polarization levels can reduce electoral accountability (M. Q. Moreira 2025; Enríquez et al. 2025). In democracies, the public influences government by maintaining political norms and threatening electoral punishment against norm violators (James 2024; Weingast 1997; Christenson and Kriner 2019). However, this requires some level of agreement about what constitutes desirable government action. When polarization is high, this agreement is difficult to find, and politicians may easily find extremist constituencies to support wide-ranging policies.

Some scholars have examined how diverging policy preferences along party lines undermine public support for U.S. alliance commitments. Analyses of longitudinal public opinion data reveal continued bipartisan support for U.S. security alliances, but some foreign policy issues are increasingly polarized (Smeltz 2022). Bäcker-Peral and Park (2024) use a series of survey experiments to examine U.S. public support for defending South Korea, a key U.S. ally, amid heightened polarization. The work shows polarization may stymie the fulfillment of U.S. alliance commitments. Furthermore, Friedrichs (2025) argues mass polarization can undermine the ability to credibly signal resolve to U.S. adversaries who "perceive domestic polarization as a sign of weakness."

Anderson, Bell, and Tretter (2023) posits several ways in which domestic political consensus shapes America's ability to achieve its nuclear nonproliferation objectives. Eroded ideological consensus has made it more difficult to garner bipartisan support for funding

nonproliferation initiatives, and it has weakened bipartisan support for the liberal internationalism framework that facilitates America's use of a diverse, and at times conflicting, set of nonproliferation policy tools. Polarization also signals instability in approaches to nonproliferation between presidential administrations, which can make potential proliferants less confident the United States will uphold their end of nonproliferation deals.

This literature suggests polarization may reduce the consistency, legitimacy, and scrutiny of U.S. foreign policymaking. If foreign audiences are attentive to the U.S. domestic environment, we might accordingly expect:

> **H5B:** As polarization in the U.S. public increases, confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility will *decrease*.

3.5 Summary of Hypotheses

Table 1 summarizes each of the hypotheses we have identified, demonstrating that preferences for a U.S. government that maximizes on *speed*—the ability to take rapid and unencumbered international action—or *scrutiny*—a tendency towards balanced, moderate policy outcomes—can lead to certain institutional features of the U.S. domestic political environment being perceived as positively or negatively contributing to U.S. nuclear credibility by key audiences. The rest of this paper discusses our empirical approach and results.

Table 1. Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Direction of Effect	Preference
1A	Democratic President	Negative	Speed
1B	Democratic Congress	Negative	Speed
2A	Democratic President	Positive	Scrutiny
2B	Democratic Congress	Positive	Scrutiny
3A	Partisan President	Positive	Speed
3B		Negative	Scrutiny
4A	Divided Government	Positive	Scrutiny
4B		Negative	Scrutiny/Speed
5A	Polarized Public	Positive	Speed
5B		Negative	Scrutiny

4 Data and Methods

4.1 The Importance of Foreign Public Opinion

To examine how publics perceive domestic institutions' role in shaping U.S. nuclear credibility, we designed and conducted an original survey experiment in August 2024 to assess the views of five publics in the United States, Australia, India, United Kingdom, and Israel (N=6009).[6] We used online sampling through Cint, with block quotas to ensure representation by age and gender.[7] Studies show these samples match national benchmarks; the sample aggregates respondents from many panels and platforms to build a diverse respondent pool that is more representative than those from many competitor firms (Munger et al. 2021).[8]

We evaluate how several features of U.S. domestic politics influence perceptions of

6. All responses are anonymous, and respondents consented to the survey. The survey has ethics approval from [REDACTED UNIVERSITY]. We conduct a limited replication in the U.S. and U.K. samples in June 2025, producing similar results. See Appendix I.

7. We use the "Marketplace" product formerly belonging to Lucid. All surveys were conducted in English. See Appendix J for the survey instrument.

8. Competitor samples often lack older respondents. We validate stratification by assessing demographics, including age, education, political ideology, and income. See Appendix D.

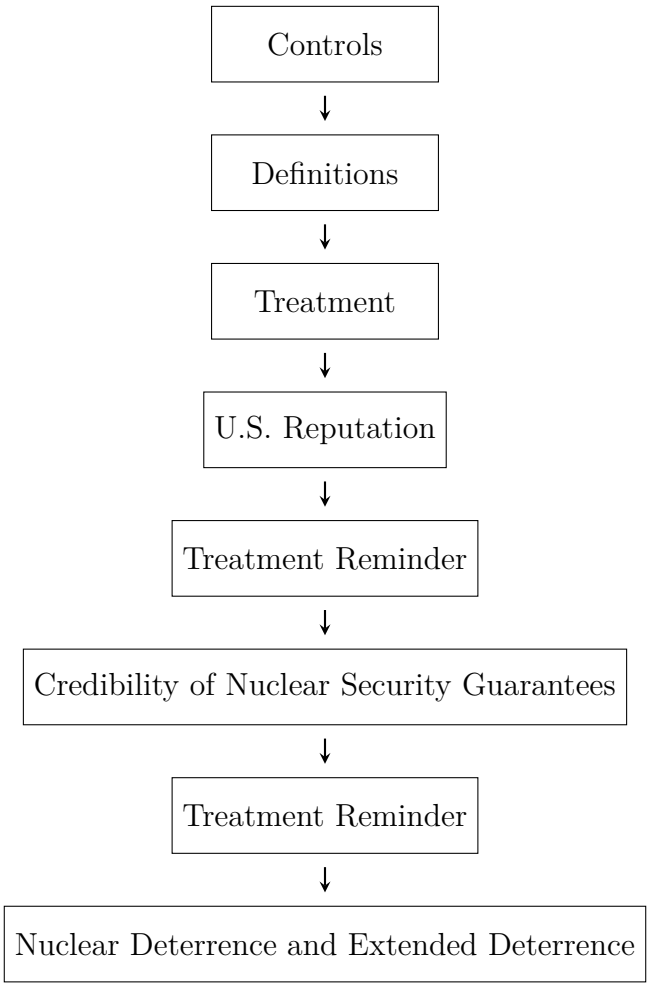
U.S. nuclear credibility. Through its wide web of alliances, the United States has long played a critical role in maintaining international peace and security. While the American public's evaluation of U.S. government performance naturally matters to U.S. politicians, due to the primacy of re-election (Mayhew 1978), foreign public opinion is also of crucial relevance. Public opinion among the citizens of allies and partners is often considered an important factor in the health of a security partnership. Indeed, trends in anti-Americanism have been extensively researched, in part because of assertions that negative foreign attitudes towards the United States can diminish the effectiveness of the United States' leadership role in maintaining global stability (Holsti 2008; Liebe and Beyer 2018; Katzenstein and Keohane 2007). Public opposition to the United States in partner states can wear down the strength of alliances, enable allied governments to shirk commitments, or result in pressure on those governments to avoid making deals, cooperating, or otherwise aligning with Washington.

Foreign public opinion shapes the character of U.S. alliances. Public opinion can influence preferences for the hawkish/dovish tendencies of elected officials, thereby changing the ideological leanings of who is seated around the global decision-making table (Kirkland 2014; Ensley 2012). Public opinion is an important constraint on how elites engage with other countries, including in the security domain (Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo 2020; Chu and Recchia 2022; Risse-Kappen 1991). Lin-Greenberg (2021) shows that even non-elected officials, namely military officers, factor public opinion into their decision-making calculus because they believe doing so helps to safeguard the military's reputation and is necessary to ensure successful operations. In extreme cases, anti-American protests have sparked new, or signaled existing, declines in allied commitments; in the nuclear domain, for example, public opposition motivated New Zealand's withdrawal from ANZUS (Lamare 1987).

4.2 Experimental Design

The survey flow is depicted in Figure 1. First, respondents were exposed to definitions of the two-party system and U.S. war powers, as well as definitions of divided government,

Figure 1. Survey Flow



partisanship, and polarization.[9] We then checked comprehension with questions about the definitions of polarization and divided government.[10]

Respondents then read information about several features of the U.S. domestic political environment. The treatment text read:

> "Imagine that it is the year 2028. The United States has a **(Republican/Democratic)** president who is **(moderate/very partisan)**, meaning that the president's beliefs are (mainstream/extreme). The majority party in Congress is the **(Republicans/Democrats)**, meaning that there is (unified/divided) government. The U.S. public is **(highly/not very)** polarized, meaning that the gap between the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans is

9. See Appendix J for survey text.

10. Incorrect responses caused respondents to be re-shown the definitions and asked the comprehension questions again. Respondents' surveys were terminated if they failed twice.

(big/small)."

Respondents were randomly assigned to be shown one of the two words contained within each bolded parenthetical. The unbolded parentheticals contain definitions that clarify the treatments. For example, if a respondent had been randomly assigned to a moderate president, they would be told the president's beliefs were mainstream.[11]

Respondents answered four types of post-treatment questions. First, to capture a general measure of U.S. reputation, respondents were asked: "How favorable or unfavorable would you feel towards this U.S. government?" Second, respondents predicted how hawkish/dovish and extreme/moderate the hypothetical U.S. government's foreign policy would be, in order to assess whether this government was seen as likely to speedily intervene on behalf of allies and to assess the level of scrutiny expected in U.S. decision-making. Third, we ask both about the viability of U.S. extended deterrence and homeland deterrence commitments. Respondents were asked how likely it would be for the U.S. government to prevent (non)nuclear attacks against NATO and (non)nuclear attacks against the United States. We also include two open-ended survey items, where respondents are asked to explain why the U.S. government's promise to protect their country against nuclear threats was or was not reliable and to explain why they did or did not believe that the U.S. could prevent nuclear attacks against NATO members.

For ease of interpretation, each dependent variable is treated as a binary measure for our main analyses. However, our results persist with continuous scales, as shown in Appendix C. Moreover, our main analyses include several pre-treatment demographic and attitudinal controls, although our results persist without their inclusion, as shown in Appendix B. We measure respondents' education level, veteran status, income level, career experience, age, sex, ideology, level of political knowledge, trust in other countries, support for the death penalty, and level of nationalism.[12] We also included a variable for ideological alignment, constructed using the presidential party treatment and the

11. We re-expose respondents to the same treatments in two later "reminders."

12. In the appendix, we examine effect heterogeneity across different demographic and attitudinal baseline groups. Specifically, Appendix F compares outcomes between respondents with and without an ideological match to the hypothetical president, Appendix G compares respondents with and without political, legal, or military career experience, and Appendix H compares respondents with low versus high political knowledge.

respondent's seven-point ideology score.[13] Each variable could correlate with foreign policy preferences. Each regression model in this study contains state fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the state level to reflect cross-national variation in attitudes about the United States and key nuclear policy issues. We also include, in Appendix I, a June 2025 replication of our study among 1,590 respondents in the United States and United Kingdom. The results are broadly similar to our main analyses and demonstrate consistency over time and presidential administrations. In the next section, we present our main findings.

5 Results

We begin by showing both Americans and foreign publics are attentive to institutional features of the U.S. policymaking environment when assessing the U.S. reputation. Sources of domestic division that reduce scrutiny and lead away from moderate policymaking are viewed negatively both at home and abroad. These findings provide insight into how and why different features of U.S. policymaking matter for Washington's international reputation. Next, we assess respondents' attitudes about the credibility of U.S. (extended) deterrence, showing this is also affected by the domestic policymaking environment in which U.S. leaders operate. Again, we find concern about domestic sources of division that impede moderate policymaking. We show these disliked domestic divisions are associated with expectations regarding the character of U.S. policymaking, lending support to the argument that foreign publics prefer a degree of scrutiny in U.S. policymaking, even if that comes at the expense of more hawkish and less encumbered leadership.

13. E.g., respondents identifying as very liberal to a little liberal were given a 1 on the binary "ideological match" variable if they been assigned to a Democrat president or a 0 if they had been assigned to a Republican president.

5.1 U.S. Reputation

Figure 2 presents each institutional feature's effect on favorability towards the U.S. government.[14] We discuss the implications for each hypothesis in turn.

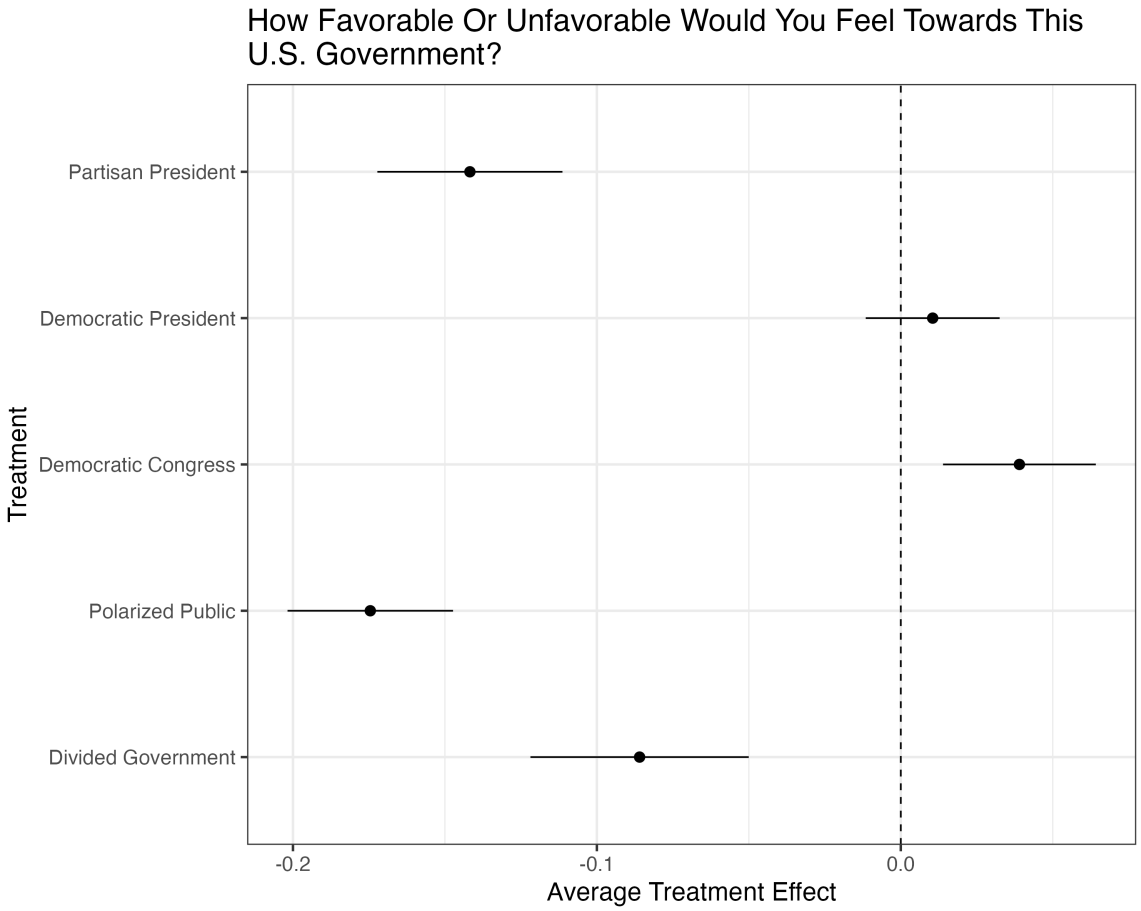


Figure 2. ATE on respondents' favorability towards the U.S. government. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 concerned what role party labels play in evaluations of the U.S. government. While party control of the White House did not seem to matter much, respondents were 4.1 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) more favorable toward the U.S. government when the Democratic party controlled Congress compared to when the Republican party held the majority of seats. This mild preference for Democrats could point to a preference for the internationalist leaning of Democrats versus concerns about Republicans' growing isolationism; this appears to supersede reticence towards Democrats'

14. Full regression tables for the coefficient estimates plotted in figure 2 can be found in Appendix A.

dovishness. For example, one respondent wrote: "I believe that the Democrats are less isolationist than the Republicans and would therefore be more willing to honor international agreements than the Republicans are." Others agreed, writing that Democrats "would be more interested in supporting [U.S.] allies," "value our allies," "would want to protect their allies," and "traditionally value international alliances (e.g., NATO) and multilateralism." Other respondents believed Democrats may act with greater scrutiny, writing, for example, that Democrats were "more clear thinkers," "make wise decisions," "lessens global risks," and are more likely to have "a strong cabinet who understands international politics" to serve as a check on decision-making. That is, many respondents appear to prefer Democrats because they prefer higher scrutiny over more efficient or hawkish decision-making.

Although respondents did not penalize the hypothetical U.S. president for their political party, they did respond unfavorably to the president holding extreme beliefs. In line with hypothesis 3B, when respondents were told that the president was very partisan, favorability towards the U.S. government was 14.6 percentage points lower ($p < 0.001$) compared to when the president was moderate. This insight into foreign public opinion parallels recent work on U.S.-only samples, which have shown the American public disfavors partisan politics (Paris 2017; Flynn and Harbridge 2016). Again, concerns about partisanship could point towards a preference for greater scrutiny in foreign policymaking. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the link between partisan leadership and unpredictable or unfavorably foreign policy decisions. They wrote: "being extremely partisan, the U.S. president would be unlikely to put themselves in a position where protecting the U.K. would come before protecting the U.S."; "allies might worry that the U.S. won't follow through as strongly or clearly as expected, especially if partisan politics gets in the way," and "the partisanship of the president and polarization among the public could lead to foreign policy becoming more reactive to domestic pressures and less consistent."

We also find support for hypotheses 4B and 5B. Favorability was 8.7 percentage points lower under divided government than unified government ($p < 0.001$). In their open-ended responses, respondents' opposition to divided government primarily focuses

on the risk of ineffective policymaking. They write that "with the divided house, [allies' interests] might struggle to get any traction" and that politicians "all need to be on the same page" for government to "work properly." Respondents were concerned that divided government "would be too weak to offer any significant or reliable protection," "would not be able to agree on anything," would lead to "slow decisions [and] poor coordination," "can make the process of decision-making slower," and "can possibly cause decision-making to stagnate during a crisis."

A highly polarized U.S. public reduced the government's favorability by 17.6 percentage points ($p < 0.001$). This was the largest effect, with the polarization treatment eliciting a more negative response than a highly partisan president ($p < 0.001$). The actions and preferences of U.S. political elites, including the president, are much more visible than those of the widespread U.S. public. Still, publics seem highly attentive to political dysfunction in the public sphere. There are at least two potential explanations for why respondents factored this dysfunction so significantly into their overall evaluation of the U.S. government. First, a polarized public may appear more likely to elect a U.S. government with a similarly divergent distribution of beliefs. Second, even if the politicians themselves are not as polarized as the electorate, re-election and reputation considerations could still incentivize them to act in ways that satisfy public pressure but produce unfavorable outcomes for allies and partners.

Many respondents pointed to polarization as a cause of skepticism about U.S. reliability. They wrote that polarization could cause: "gridlock...disarray, and infighting," make "the U.S. at least appear to be erratic and less reliable," and that with a polarized public "any decision will alienate half the population and potentially cause unrest so the country would be paralyzed." Supporting Schultz's insights, one respondent wrote that polarization could make allies "worry about future shifts in leadership or partisan reversals," while others argued lower levels of polarization would promote "continuity and stability in foreign policy," and enable "coordinated and consistent policy responses." Another wrote that, "with a highly polarized divide in the U.S., all they would do is argue amongst themselves and with other nations."

In sum, figure 2 provides strong evidence that domestic institutional characteristics influence public perceptions of the U.S. government. Respondents were more favorable towards the U.S. government when there was a Democratic Congress and less favorable when the president was partisan, when there was divided government, and when the U.S. public was highly polarized. While the negative attitude towards divided government suggests a preference for swift and effective U.S. policy-making, the negative views towards partisan presidents and polarized public are largely in line with a preference for scrutiny and suggest a substantial desire for U.S. policymaking to maintain key checks-and-balances while featuring more moderate and consistent views.

5.2 Perceptions of U.S. Extended Deterrence

Table 2 demonstrates how the U.S. policymaking environment specifically affects the U.S. reputation in the nuclear domain. Respondents were asked how likely it would be for the U.S. government to prevent nuclear attacks against NATO and against the United States, as well as non-nuclear attacks against NATO and the United States. These represent measures of the expected effectiveness of U.S. nuclear (extended) deterrence across several scenarios. The final column in Table 2 represents the perceived reliability of the United States' promise to protect the respondent's country against nuclear threats.[15]

Table 2 shows consistent directional support for H1B's prediction that confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility would decrease if Democrats controlled Congress, but only the effect on perceptions of the ability to prevent nuclear attacks against the United States is statistically significant. A Democratic Congress was considered 1.6 less likely to prevent nuclear attacks against the United States ($p < 0.1$). Perceptions of the Democratic party's internationalism perhaps failed to compensate for their dovish reputation. We again do not find statistically significant effects for the president's party, suggesting other features of domestic politics play a more important role. This is particularly notable in the post-Trump era.

We found consistent directional support for hypothesis 3B, which predicted that a

15. For U.S. respondents, this reflects the perceived reliability of the United States' security guarantees to allies.

partisan U.S. president would decrease confidence in U.S. nuclear leadership. All five effects were negative, but not all achieved statistical significance. Having a partisan president significantly decreased respondents' beliefs that the U.S. government was likely to prevent non-nuclear attacks against NATO countries by 2.8 percentage points ($p < 0.1$) and against the United States by 1.8 percentage points ($p < 0.1$). When respondents were asked about the U.S. government's ability to prevent nuclear attacks against their own country, the effect size increased, with respondents viewing this as 4 percentage points less likely under a partisan president compared to a moderate one ($p < 0.001$). In line with our previous results, the U.S. reputation appears to be damaged by a partisan president.

Our findings also support H4B. When the U.S. government was divided, publics perceived Washington as being less able to prevent both nuclear and non-nuclear attacks, but only the nuclear outcomes yielded statistically significant effects. Specifically, respondents perceived that a divided government was 1.8 percentage points less likely to prevent nuclear attacks against NATO countries ($p < 0.001$) and 1.7 percentage points less likely to prevent one against the United States ($p < 0.05$). Divided government reduced perceptions of homeland deterrence by 4 percentage points ($p < 0.001$).

Polarization again emerged as a dominant determinant of confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility. Across all five dependent variables, high polarization in the U.S. public decreased the credibility of U.S. nuclear deterrence (H5B). When the U.S. public was described as highly polarized, respondents were 2.8 percentage points less likely to think that the U.S. government would successfully prevent nuclear attacks against NATO countries ($p < 0.001$). This "polarization penalty" increased for other nuclear deterrence outcomes. A U.S. government subject to a polarized public appeared 3.1 percentage points less likely to prevent nuclear attacks against the United States ($p < 0.05$) and 5.3 percentage points less likely to fulfill extended deterrence commitments ($p < 0.001$). High levels of public polarization also reduced the U.S. government's perceived ability to prevent non-nuclear attacks against NATO countries by 2.9 percentage points ($p < 0.1$) and by 3.7 percentage points for preventing non-nuclear attacks against the United States ($p < 0.01$). These results highlight the important role domestic public opinion plays in communicating resolve

and shaping expectations of foreign policy outcomes. Respondents perceived a real and significant relationship between U.S. public opinion and U.S. military policy. In other words, respondents may use U.S. public opinion as a heuristic for the U.S. government's commitment to its alliances.

Respondents viewed U.S. domestic politics as fundamental to the U.S. nuclear reputation. Even those who pointed to U.S. capabilities or treaty commitments expressed concerns that certain elements of domestic dysfunction could wear away U.S. credibility. For example, one respondent wrote: "While the U.S. government in this scenario faces internal political challenges, its longstanding strategic commitment to NATO, strong deterrence posture, and executive authority in national defense make it reasonably capable of preventing a nuclear attack against NATO. However, its effectiveness could be weakened by political division and public reluctance, which could undermine deterrence if not carefully managed." Another explained that the government "would recognize that the credibility of NATO's collective defense (Article 5) is foundational to global security...However, extreme polarization might affect political messaging or delay decisions in a crisis." Indeed, respondents repeatedly linked polarization to policy outcomes that could undermine deterrence, writing that "low public polarization also means little resistance to defending trusted partners" and "the lack of public polarization reduces the risk of widespread opposition or backlash, giving the administration more freedom to act," while "a highly polarised Congress might resist... efforts related to nuclear defence."

Respondents often prioritized the domestic political environment in their response, arguing it would determine the viability of U.S. commitments. Many such respondents looked favorably upon unified government as a way to achieve more effective and decisive policies, but expressed concerns that partisanship and polarization would undermine commitments by preventing thoughtful and moderate policymaking.

For example, unified government was seen to enable speedy responses during crises. As one respondent explained: "Unified Government Increases Policy Cohesion: With both the presidency and Congress controlled by the same party, especially a traditionally defense-oriented party like the Republicans, there would likely be fewer legislative

obstacles to taking decisive action in defense of allies. This alignment generally allows for quicker, more coordinated responses to international threats." Others wrote: "This U.S. government would likely prevent nuclear attacks on NATO... Congress is unified and can act fast," and that "with both the president and Congress under Republican control, decisions could be made and implemented fast, especially when it comes to national defense."

Respondents saw partisan leaders as undermining scrutiny in foreign policy-making, and they emphasized the value of moderate policies. For example, respondents wrote that moderate governments have more "strategic coherence in foreign policy and defense," "would employ people who knew what they were doing and be effective and working with other countries," "would leave the U.S. very unlikely to abandon its treaty commitments," would be "more likely to avoid escalatory rhetoric or reckless provocations, reducing the chance of miscalculation by nuclear-armed adversaries," "would reaffirm deterrence policies in calm, calculated terms, projecting resolve with minimizing risk of unnecessary conflict," and "would lead to the cooperation and the stable foreign policy." One respondent explained U.S. nuclear deterrence was credible because there was "a sensible government...with a sensible moderate president...[that] would take advisement from...the Pentagon, and they would listen to their advice...[and] listen to his intelligence briefings." Some respondents were explicitly concerned that partisans would lean towards isolationist views, for example writing that "the isolationist view [of a partisan president] would prevail, [and] any threat to the US would result in a withdrawal from [NATO]," while others emphasized that partisan governments would have fewer checks, writing for example that partisans would make decisions that would be "politically based, instead of being strategic."[16]

Respondents were averse to divided government, fearing it would hamper policymaking, and expressed concerns that polarization and partisanship would prevent moderate

16. Nevertheless, a very small number of respondents viewed the extreme policymaking of partisans as potentially reinforcing deterrence, explaining that "other countries understand the volatility of the [partisan] administration and would not use nuclear weapons for fear of the U.S. retaliating and escalating a nuclear conflict" and that "MAD would still apply, probably more so with an extreme government, so I think any country whose leadership has an ounce of self preservation wouldn't attack."

and responsible U.S. policymaking. Both the U.S. public and foreign publics appear to view domestic politics as an important component of nuclear and non-nuclear and well as homeland and extended deterrence.

Table 2. U.S. Government Ability To Prevent Attacks From Happening

	NATO Nuclear	NATO Non-Nuclear	U.S. Nuclear	U.S. Non-Nuclear	Extended Deterrence
Divided Government	-0.018*** (0.005)	-0.013 (0.015)	-0.017* (0.008)	-0.003 (0.008)	-0.040*** (0.012)
Polarized Public	-0.028*** (0.002)	-0.029+ (0.015)	-0.031* (0.013)	-0.037** (0.012)	-0.053*** (0.011)
Democratic Congress	-0.009 (0.013)	-0.007 (0.007)	-0.016+ (0.009)	-0.003 (0.006)	0.002 (0.015)
Democratic President	-0.015 (0.018)	0.005 (0.014)	-0.014 (0.011)	0.001 (0.017)	0.001 (0.013)
Partisan President	-0.019 (0.014)	-0.028+ (0.014)	-0.020 (0.013)	-0.018+ (0.010)	-0.040*** (0.010)
Ideological Match	0.045+ (0.024)	0.060*** (0.012)	0.039* (0.020)	0.049** (0.017)	0.076** (0.025)
Female	-0.016 (0.027)	-0.016 (0.026)	-0.032 (0.025)	-0.039* (0.018)	-0.061* (0.029)
Age	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.001+ (0.001)	-0.001* (0.000)	0.001+ (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Veteran	-0.035 (0.025)	-0.007 (0.007)	-0.029 (0.019)	0.010 (0.022)	-0.003 (0.030)
Conservative	-0.010 (0.008)	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.010+ (0.005)	-0.011* (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)
Law/Gov/IO Career	0.069* (0.028)	0.074** (0.026)	0.014 (0.017)	-0.015 (0.015)	0.018 (0.022)
Education	-0.006 (0.005)	-0.009 (0.010)	0.005 (0.008)	0.002 (0.008)	0.001 (0.005)
Income	0.005 (0.003)	0.002+ (0.001)	0.002 (0.003)	0.002+ (0.001)	0.006** (0.002)
Political Knowledge	0.032*** (0.006)	0.007** (0.003)	0.028** (0.010)	0.029*** (0.004)	0.043*** (0.012)
Trust	0.055*** (0.014)	0.059*** (0.008)	0.040** (0.012)	0.038** (0.014)	0.083*** (0.013)
Death Penalty	0.025* (0.013)	0.025*** (0.007)	0.014 (0.012)	0.010 (0.008)	0.019*** (0.005)
Nationalism	0.051*** (0.011)	0.048*** (0.007)	0.042** (0.015)	0.047*** (0.014)	0.051*** (0.005)
Num.Obs.	6099	6099	6099	6099	6079
R2	0.053	0.038	0.029	0.028	0.090
R2 Adj.	0.050	0.035	0.025	0.025	0.087
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5.3 Expectations of U.S. Policymaking

The effect of the domestic policymaking environment on the U.S. reputation is, in part, shaped by how respondents' infer various political conditions will impact U.S. decision-making. We identify two features of policymaking—speed and scrutiny—that might enhance the U.S. reputation. Some might prefer a hawkish U.S. government that is able to quickly, and without significant political barriers, take military action. On the other hand, some may prefer a U.S. government that is able to carefully assess policy

options, even if this could, at times, reduce the ability to jump into action.

In this section, we show how respondents believe domestic political features influence U.S. policymaking. We ask respondents to predict how moderate (versus extreme) and how hawkish (versus dovish) the foreign policy choices of the government described in their assigned treatment would be. We cautiously map hawkishness onto our model of *speed* and moderation onto our model of *scrutiny*. Although these only represent two components of a speed-maximizing or scrutiny-maximizing government, they are key components that—as previously described—many respondents refer to in their assessments of U.S. credibility.

Table 3 shows moderate U.S. foreign policy was associated with higher favorability toward the U.S. government ($p < 0.001$), while predictions of hawkishness were associated with lower favorability ($p < 0.05$). This reflects our findings elsewhere of a general leaning towards political environments that create conditions for greater scrutiny.

Table 3. U.S. Government Favorability and Foreign Policy Predictions

	(1)
Moderate Foreign Policy	0.086*** (0.019)
Hawkish Foreign Policy	−0.073* (0.031)
Ideological Match	0.116*** (0.026)
Female	−0.034+ (0.018)
Age	−0.003*** (0.001)
Veteran	0.033 (0.029)
Conservative	0.004 (0.007)
Law/Gov/IO Career	0.074 (0.047)
Education	0.007 (0.006)
Income	0.008* (0.004)
Political Knowledge	0.032*** (0.008)
Trust	0.079*** (0.006)
Death Penalty	0.019+ (0.011)
Nationalism	0.047*** (0.006)
Num.Obs.	6099
R2	0.125
R2 Adj.	0.122
Std.Errors	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes
Controls	Yes

Table 4 shows how each treatment impacted expectations about the U.S. government's approach to foreign policy. Respondents associated polarization with less moderate ($p < 0.01$) and more hawkish ($p < 0.1$) foreign policy. Similarly, a partisan president's foreign policy was predicted to be 12.2 percentage points less moderate ($p < 0.001$) and 2.2 percentage points more hawkish ($p < 0.001$). This aligns with our analysis that these two sources of domestic dysfunction may undermine scrutiny, and that concerns about

this may even supercede incentives to prefer less-constrained, more interventionist governments. In line with partisan stereotype literature, respondents associated Democrats with more dovish and moderate foreign policy. In contrast to our expectations, unified government was also seen to be more moderate.[17] These results provide limited insight into why the U.S. reputation—including in the high-stakes nuclear domain—appears to be contingent on U.S. domestic politics. The environment in which U.S. foreign policy is made is seen to shape the outcomes that will be chosen.

17. Respondents associated divided government with more hawkish ($p < 0.001$) and less moderate ($p < 0.05$) foreign policy.

Table 4. Effect of U.S. Domestic Political Conditions On Respondents' Foreign Policy Predictions

	Hawkish (Speed)	Moderate (Scrutiny)
Divided Government	0.022*** (0.005)	−0.016* (0.008)
Polarized Public	0.039+ (0.020)	−0.038** (0.012)
Democratic Congress	−0.037** (0.013)	0.025** (0.009)
Democratic President	−0.064*** (0.013)	0.028* (0.012)
Partisan President	0.066** (0.023)	−0.122*** (0.016)
Ideological Match	−0.009* (0.004)	0.000 (0.018)
Female	−0.015 (0.015)	−0.025 (0.016)
Age	−0.001* (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)
Veteran	0.042 (0.031)	−0.022 (0.034)
Conservative	0.007 (0.006)	−0.013*** (0.002)
Law/Gov/IO Career	−0.026 (0.017)	−0.031 (0.021)
Education	−0.005 (0.004)	0.004*** (0.001)
Income	−0.002 (0.003)	0.005* (0.002)
Political Knowledge	0.013*** (0.004)	0.021+ (0.012)
Trust	−0.034** (0.013)	0.025** (0.010)
Death Penalty	0.001 (0.019)	−0.013** (0.005)
Nationalism	−0.008 (0.006)	−0.001 (0.006)
Num.Obs.	6099	6099
R2	0.025	0.050
R2 Adj.	0.021	0.047
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes

6 Conclusion

Our results show domestic threats to effective U.S. governance can weaken allies' and partners' confidence in U.S. international commitments. Partisanship, polarization, and divided government reduced the general reputation of the U.S. government as well as its specific reputation in the nuclear domain. While our study design offers advantages over previous work, by expanding the geographical scope of scholarship on domestic politics and foreign reputation, future studies should examine generalizability further by testing these arguments on elites, in other regions, and among U.S. adversaries. Furthermore, future studies should extrapolate to other foreign policy domains, detailing the conditions under which domestic politics and international reputation are tied.

Our research shows contentious domestic politics affects expectations about U.S. foreign policy. Allied and partner publics anticipated foreign policy decisions made under conditions of domestic dysfunction would negatively affect them. Importantly, we show the nuclear domain is not immune from the pressures of domestic politics. Instead, domestic political dysfunction could impair U.S. deterrence and reassurance efforts by lowering confidence in U.S. nuclear credibility.

Our work also contributes to debates about how foreign publics evaluate U.S. behavior. We show publics exhibit a preference for considered scrutiny in many cases; respondents generally react unfavorably to U.S. domestic political conditions that allow for more extreme policymaking or erode checks-and-balances.

Importantly, the strong aversion we find to partisanship and polarization not only outweighs considerations about the party control of Congress, but it also persists in scenarios with both Democrats and Republicans in the White House. In addition, both our main findings from a study conducted during the Biden Administration, and the replication in Appendix I conducted during the second Trump Administration demonstrate that domestic political conditions, even beyond the president's party, impede U.S. nuclear credibility. With partisan politics and polarization growing ever stronger, these results raise questions about the ability of the United States to deter adversaries and maintain alliances and partnerships against the backdrop of domestic political turmoil. Our re-

sults suggest that, even if party control of Congress or the presidency were to change, persistent, divisive patterns in both public and elite politics could continue to harm the U.S. reputation, including in the nuclear domain.

These findings contribute to a growing literature that evinces an increasingly porous divide between domestic politics and foreign policy. It has implications for scholarship on reputation by demonstrating that, beyond a state's pattern of past actions, the contemporary reputation of its leaders—and the broader elements of its domestic politics, including at the level of the mass public—shape expectations about state behavior. Even in the nuclear domain, long thought to be mostly isolated from wavering domestic affairs, we find that domestic politics matter. The United States' contentious domestic political environment may be an overlooked, yet increasingly potent, source of destabilization in the nuclear order.

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Appendix

A. Main Results: Favorability DV

Table A1. How Favorable Or Unfavorable Would You Feel Towards This U.S. Government?

	(1)	(2)
Divided Government	-0.080*** (0.021)	-0.087*** (0.019)
Polarized Public	-0.176*** (0.011)	-0.176*** (0.014)
Democratic Congress	0.030** (0.010)	0.041** (0.013)
Democratic President	0.013 (0.008)	0.011 (0.009)
Partisan President	-0.147*** (0.011)	-0.146*** (0.014)
Ideological Match		0.117*** (0.025)
Female		-0.039+ (0.022)
Age		-0.002*** (0.001)
Veteran		0.024 (0.022)
Conservative		0.002 (0.007)
Law/Gov/IO Career		0.069 (0.043)
Education		0.008 (0.005)
Income		0.009* (0.004)
Political Knowledge		0.033*** (0.004)
Trust		0.082*** (0.005)
Death Penalty		0.012 (0.014)
Nationalism		0.046*** (0.005)
Num.Obs.	6740	6099
R2	0.110	0.173
R2 Adj.	0.109	0.170
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes

B. Robustness: No Control Variables

Table B1. U.S. Government Ability To Prevent Attacks From Happening (Binary DVs)

	NATO Nuclear	NATO Non-Nuclear	U.S. Nuclear	U.S. Non-Nuclear	Extended Deterrence
Divided Government	-0.015 (0.010)	-0.014 (0.012)	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.009)	-0.038* (0.015)
Polarized Public	-0.038*** (0.005)	-0.040* (0.018)	-0.040** (0.013)	-0.038*** (0.010)	-0.064*** (0.017)
Democratic Congress	-0.011 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.018** (0.007)	-0.002 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.015)
Democratic President	-0.017 (0.017)	0.004 (0.015)	-0.011 (0.012)	-0.002 (0.016)	0.004 (0.014)
Partisan President	-0.018 (0.012)	-0.027+ (0.015)	-0.015 (0.011)	-0.013 (0.011)	-0.039*** (0.011)
Num.Obs.	6740	6740	6740	6740	6718
R2	0.019	0.010	0.010	0.004	0.038
R2 Adj.	0.018	0.009	0.008	0.003	0.036
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	No	No

C. Robustness: Ordinal Outcome Variables

Table C1. How Favorable Or Unfavorable Would You Feel Towards This U.S. Government? (Continuous DVs)

	(1)	(2)
Divided Government	-0.169*** (0.040)	-0.189*** (0.044)
Polarized Public	-0.464*** (0.039)	-0.452*** (0.053)
Democratic Congress	0.087* (0.034)	0.101** (0.036)
Democratic President	0.040+ (0.023)	0.036+ (0.021)
Partisan President	-0.412*** (0.052)	-0.407*** (0.065)
Ideological Match		0.305** (0.098)
Female		-0.081+ (0.042)
Age		-0.004*** (0.000)
Veteran		0.041 (0.057)
Conservative		0.010 (0.030)
Law/Gov/IO Career		0.168+ (0.099)
Education		-0.004 (0.008)
Income		0.018+ (0.010)
Political Knowledge		0.020 (0.013)
Trust		0.226*** (0.015)
Death Penalty		0.042 (0.042)
Nationalism		0.135*** (0.008)
Num.Obs.	6740	6099
R2	0.123	0.186
R2 Adj.	0.122	0.183
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes

Table C2. U.S. Government Ability To Prevent Attacks From Happening (Continuous DVs)

	NATO Nuclear	NATO Non-Nuclear	U.S. Nuclear	U.S. Non-Nuclear	Extended Deterrence
Divided Government	-0.028* (0.013)	-0.026 (0.024)	0.006 (0.014)	-0.002 (0.024)	-0.079*** (0.022)
Polarized Public	-0.049*** (0.008)	-0.044* (0.020)	-0.067* (0.027)	-0.065** (0.023)	-0.106*** (0.016)
Democratic Congress	-0.010 (0.021)	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.020 (0.020)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.033)
Democratic President	-0.031 (0.027)	0.003 (0.018)	-0.040 (0.025)	0.001 (0.015)	0.011 (0.019)
Partisan President	-0.044+ (0.026)	-0.024 (0.017)	-0.037 (0.024)	-0.018 (0.026)	-0.108*** (0.031)
Ideological Match	0.121** (0.040)	0.134*** (0.025)	0.111* (0.051)	0.112** (0.037)	0.201*** (0.054)
Female	-0.024 (0.046)	-0.017 (0.047)	-0.095* (0.041)	-0.101** (0.036)	-0.122+ (0.065)
Age	-0.004** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Veteran	-0.049 (0.052)	-0.027 (0.025)	-0.037* (0.015)	0.015 (0.029)	0.034 (0.085)
Conservative	-0.017 (0.020)	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.026+ (0.013)	-0.020 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.023)
Law/Gov/IO Career	0.167** (0.055)	0.160** (0.060)	0.077* (0.030)	-0.017 (0.029)	0.116* (0.059)
Education	-0.009 (0.016)	-0.021 (0.019)	0.012 (0.018)	0.007 (0.019)	-0.020 (0.015)
Income	0.015** (0.005)	0.005 (0.004)	0.008+ (0.005)	0.003 (0.002)	0.011* (0.005)
Political Knowledge	0.065*** (0.009)	0.026** (0.008)	0.080*** (0.015)	0.064*** (0.014)	0.067*** (0.018)
Trust	0.129*** (0.021)	0.127*** (0.015)	0.081** (0.029)	0.076*** (0.018)	0.229*** (0.035)
Death Penalty	0.066* (0.027)	0.074*** (0.015)	0.043+ (0.024)	0.036 (0.023)	0.059*** (0.012)
Nationalism	0.128*** (0.015)	0.113*** (0.009)	0.114*** (0.026)	0.124*** (0.021)	0.146*** (0.015)
Num.Obs.	6099	6099	6099	6099	6079
R2	0.082	0.057	0.047	0.040	0.114
R2 Adj.	0.079	0.054	0.044	0.037	0.111
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

D. Descriptive Statistics

Table D1. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Country

Country	Count
Australia	921
India	1192
Israel	371
United Kingdom	1972
United States	2284

Table D2. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Veteran Status

Veteran	Count
No	5905
Yes	781
I prefer not to answer.	54

Table D3. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Monthly Income Level

Income	Count
0 – 1,000 GBP	751
1,001 – 2,000 GBP	1305
2,001 – 3,000 GBP	1087
3,001 – 4,000 GBP	891
4,001 – 5,000 GBP	595
5,001 – 6,000 GBP	473
6,001 – 7,000 GBP	359
7,001 – 8,000 GBP	357
> 8,000 GBP	613
I prefer not to answer.	309

Table D4. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Ideology

Ideology	Count
A little conservative	617
A little liberal	646
Conservative	909
Liberal	1156
Moderate	2005
Very conservative	552
Very liberal	583
I prefer not to answer.	272

Table D5. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Semi-Elite Status

Semi-Elite	Count
No	6094
Yes	581
I prefer not to answer.	65

Table D6. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Education Level

Education	Count
Elementary	123
Lower Secondary	340
Upper Secondary	1871
Associate Degree	917
Bachelor's Degree	2046
Graduate Degree, e.g., Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree	1337
I prefer not to answer.	106

Table D7. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Political Knowledge Level

Reading Politics Freq.	Count
Not at all	332
Infrequently	665
Sometimes	2399
Often	3344

E. Effect of Polarization Treatment on Key Outcomes

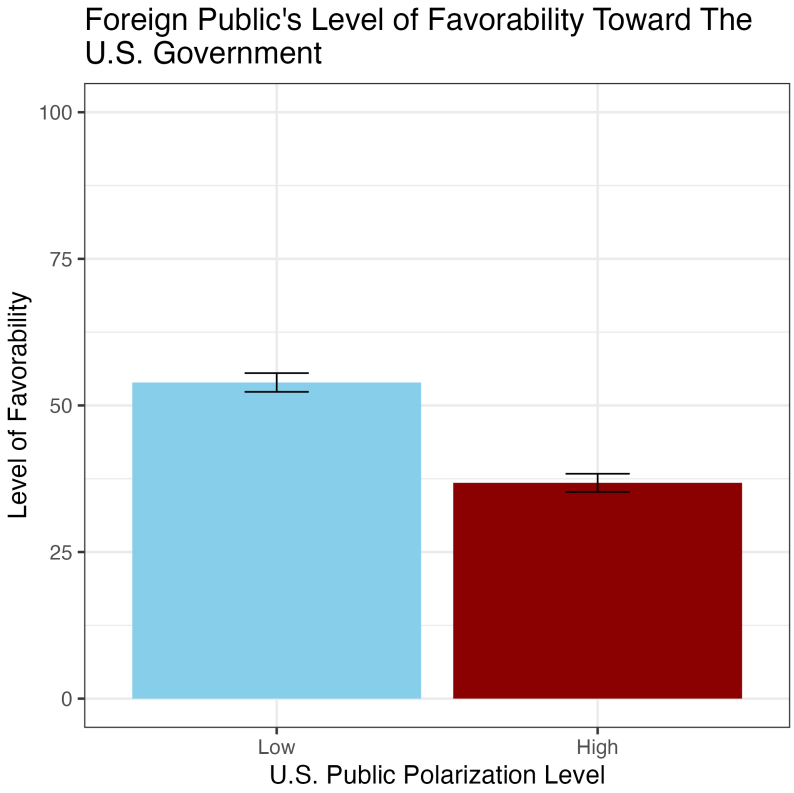

Figure E1. Effect of Polarization on Binary Favorability Outcome (Aggregated)

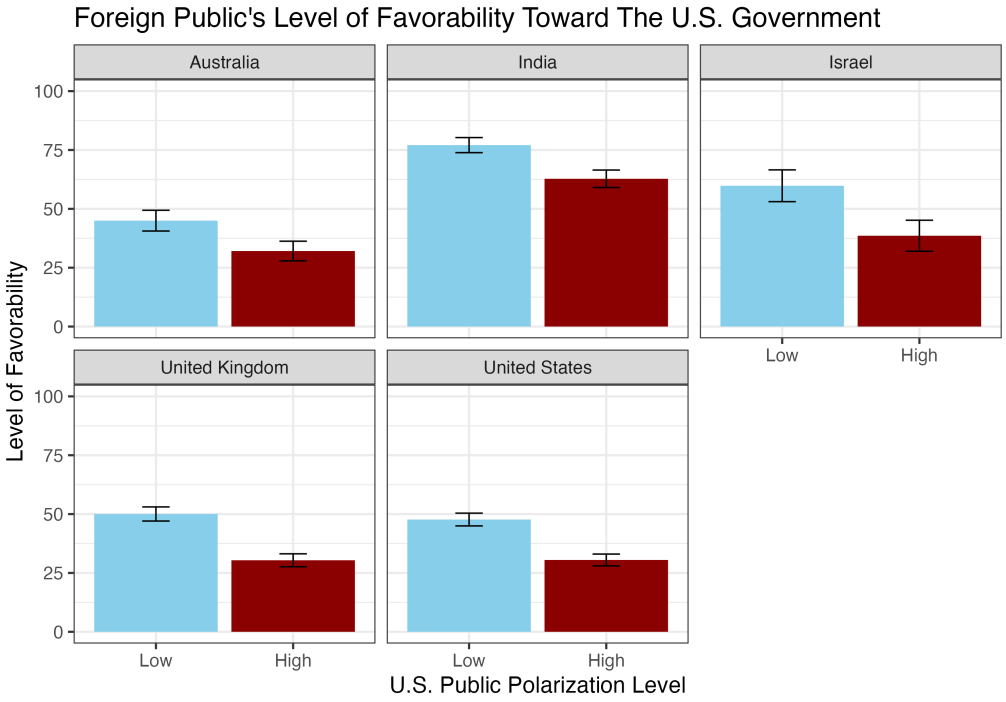

Figure E2. Effect of Polarization on Binary Favorability Outcome (Country-Level)

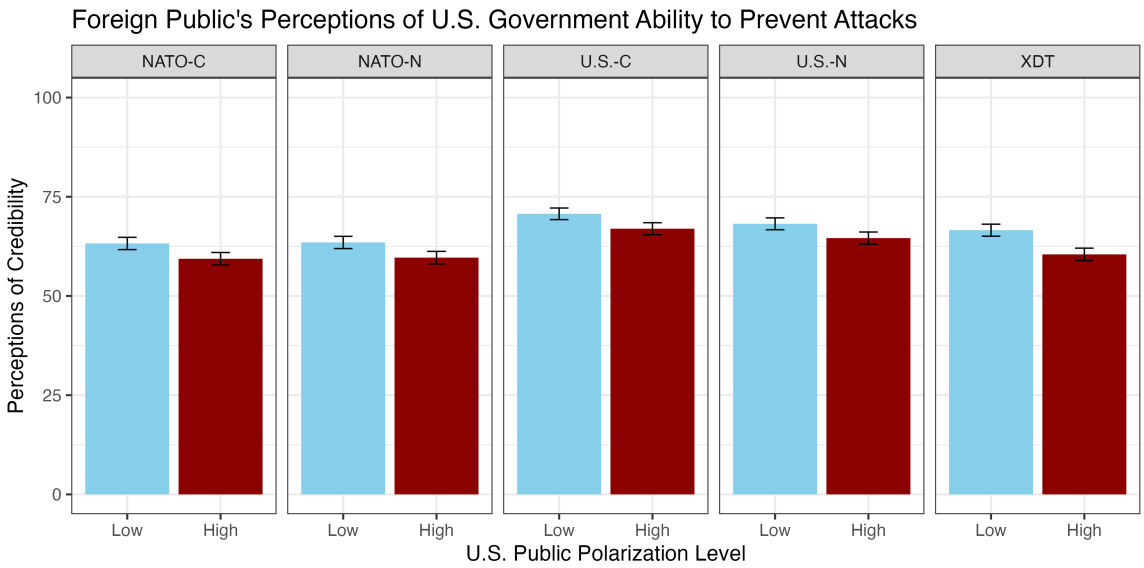

Figure E3. Effect of Polarization on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Aggregated)

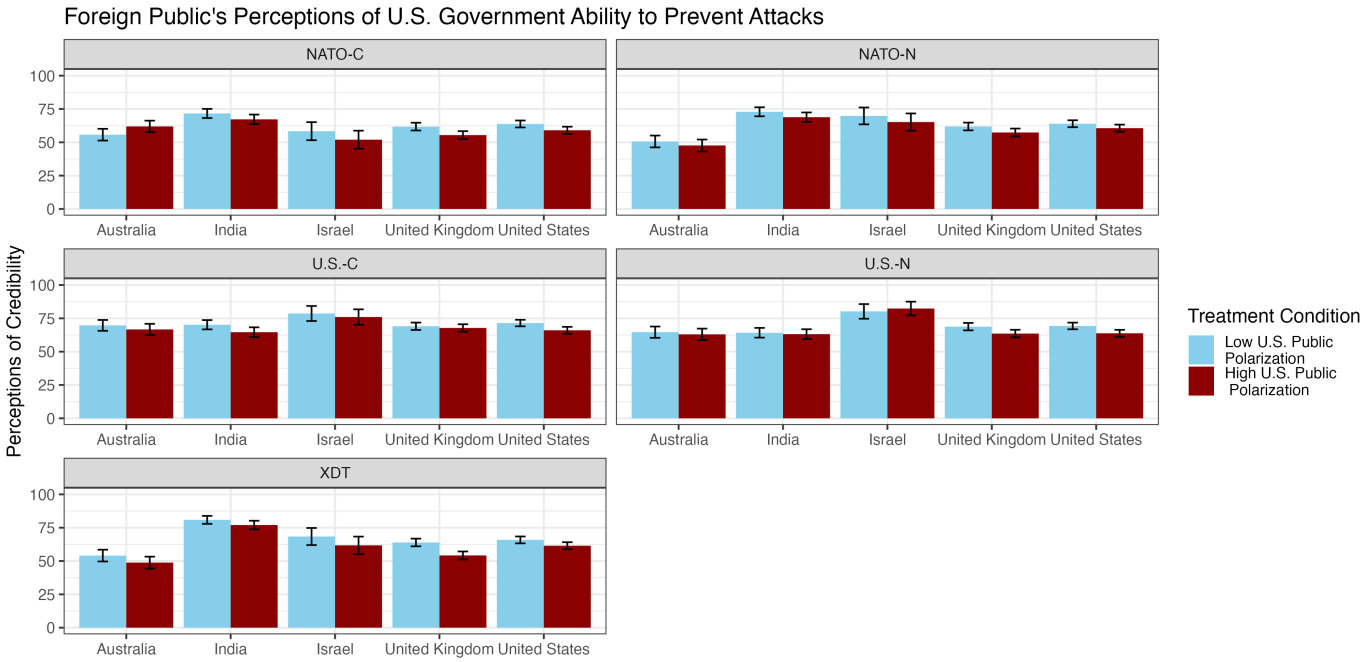

Figure E4. Effect of Polarization on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Country-Level)

F. Heterogeneous Treatment Effect: Ideological Match

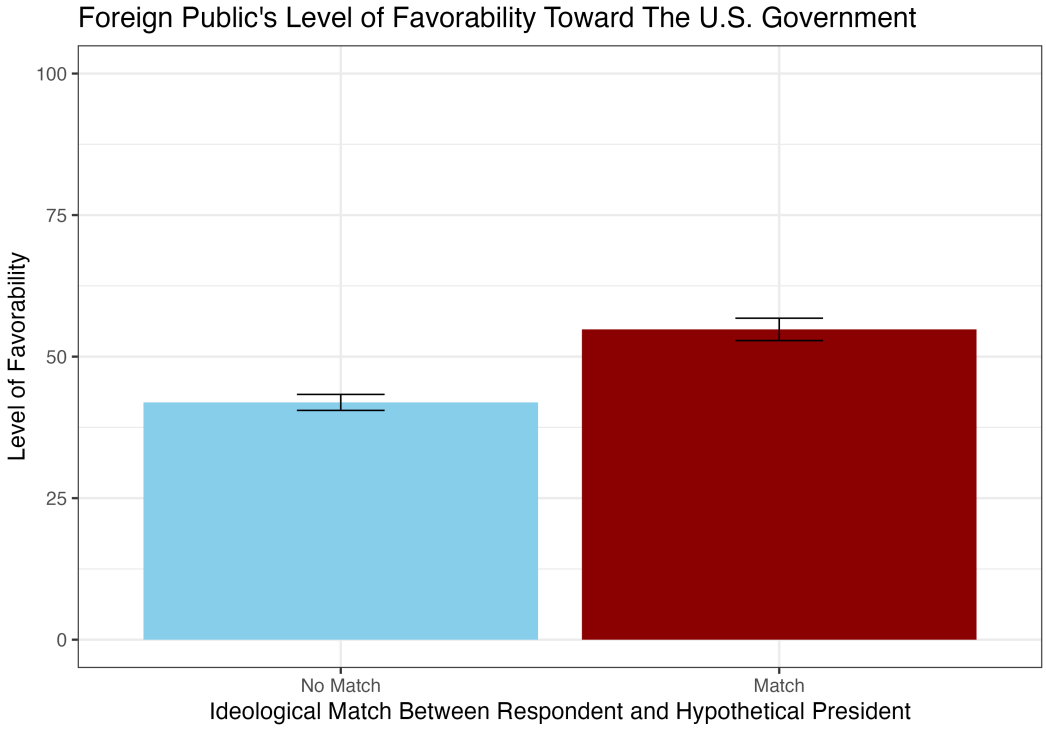

Figure F1. Effect of Ideological Match on Binary Favorability Outcome (Aggregated Results)

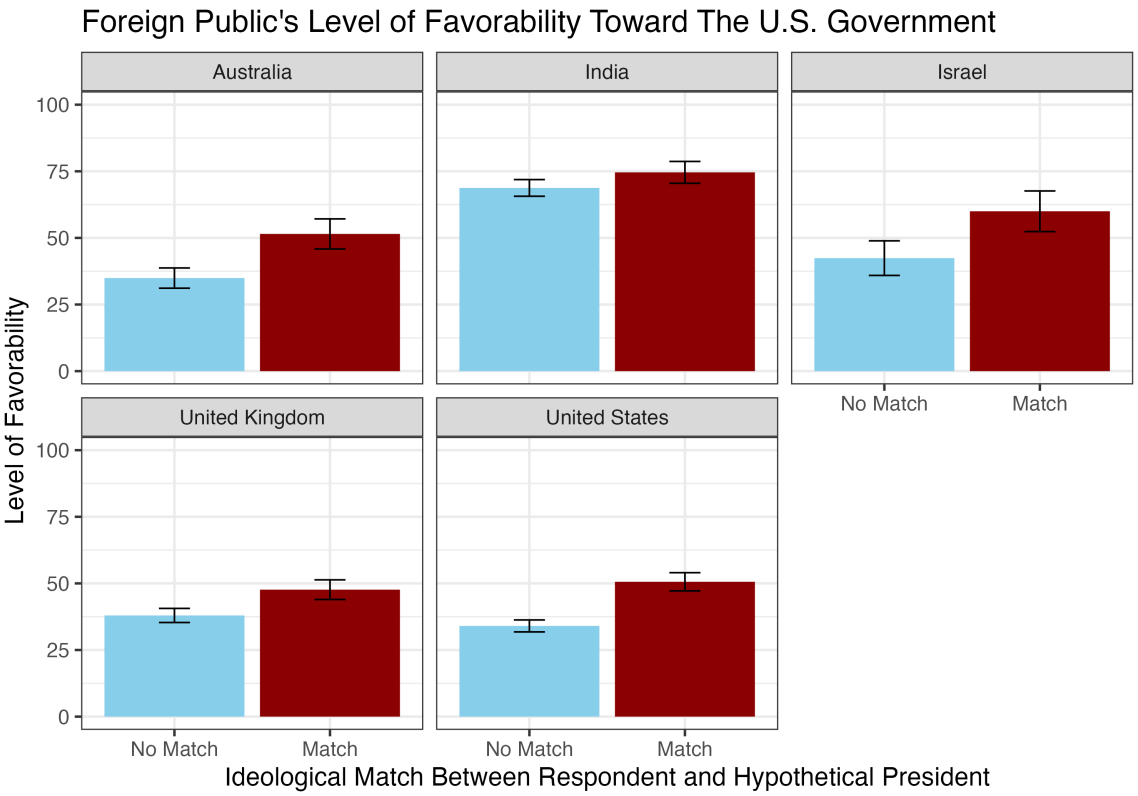

Figure F2. Effect of Ideological Match on Binary Favorability Outcome (Country-Level Results)

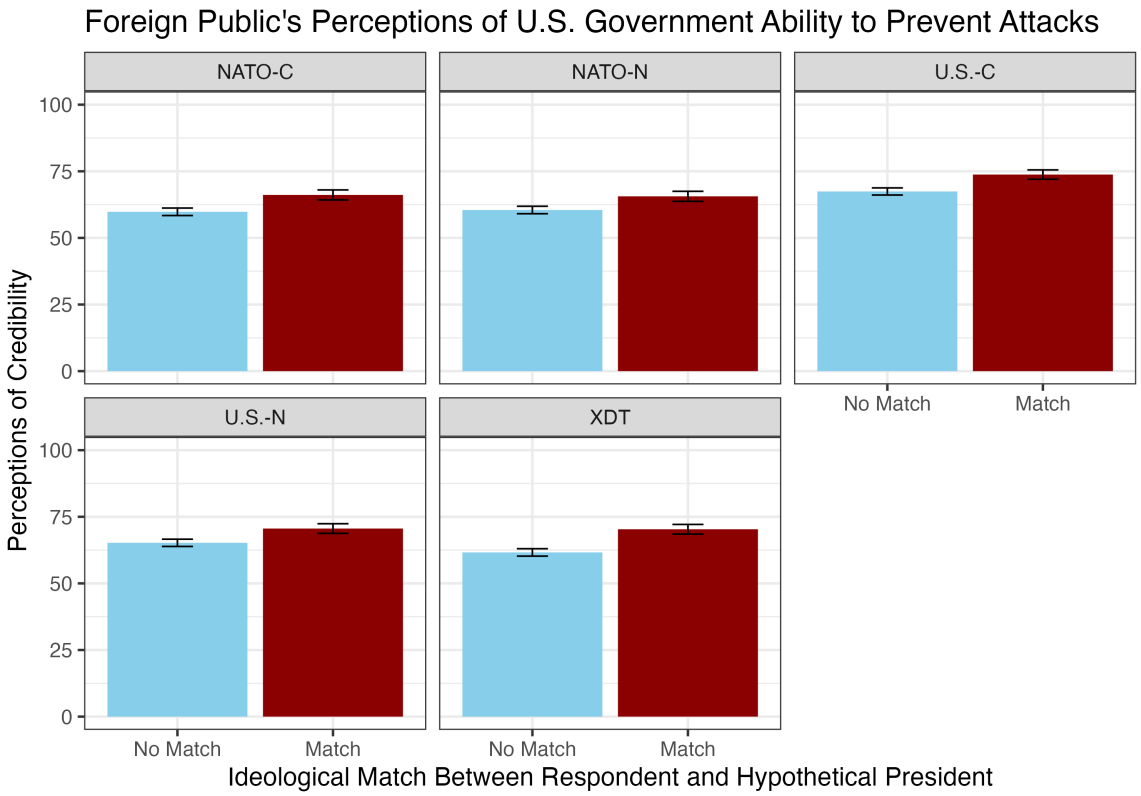

Figure F3. Effect of Ideological Match on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Aggregated Results)

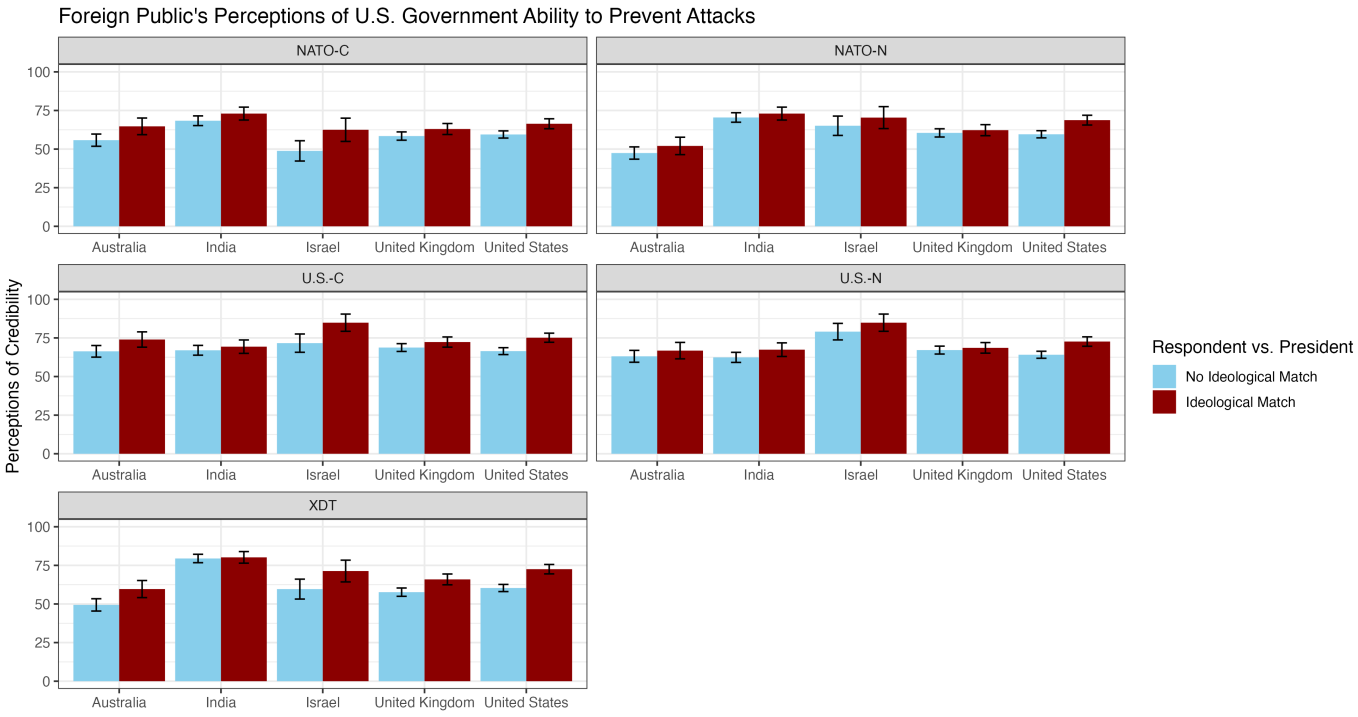

Figure F4. Effect of Ideological Match on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Country-Level Results)

G. Heterogeneous Treatment Effect: Semi-Elite Status

In the following tables, we subset the data to only include those respondents who self-identified as working in law, national security, government, or international organizations. We label this subset of respondents "semi-elite." Like those presented in the main section of the paper, these results use binary (0-to-1) outcome variables, include all demographic and attitudinal controls, as well as state fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the state level.

Table G1. How Favorable Or Unfavorable Would You Feel Towards This U.S. Government? (Semi-Elite Subsample)

	(1)	(2)
Divided Government	-0.050*** (0.015)	-0.058+ (0.034)
Polarized Public	-0.102** (0.037)	-0.086 (0.060)
Democratic Congress	-0.047 (0.042)	-0.047 (0.047)
Democratic President	-0.001 (0.054)	-0.014 (0.052)
Partisan President	-0.081 (0.050)	-0.071 (0.049)
Ideological Match		0.065 (0.054)
Female		-0.042 (0.049)
Age		-0.004** (0.001)
Veteran		0.055* (0.028)
Conservative		0.011* (0.005)
Education		-0.032 (0.026)
Income		0.001 (0.008)
Political Knowledge		0.040+ (0.023)
Trust		0.036 (0.028)
Death Penalty		0.034+ (0.020)
Nationalism		0.072* (0.030)
Num.Obs.	581	552
R2	0.166	0.227
R2 Adj.	0.153	0.198
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes

Table G2. U.S. Government Ability To Prevent Attacks From Happening (Semi-Elite Subsample)

	NATO Nuclear	NATO Non-Nuclear	U.S. Nuclear	U.S. Non-Nuclear	Extended Deterrence
Divided Government	0.017 (0.022)	0.025 (0.048)	-0.002 (0.016)	0.036 (0.049)	0.006 (0.035)
Polarized Public	-0.004 (0.021)	-0.022 (0.044)	-0.016 (0.053)	-0.042* (0.021)	-0.013 (0.053)
Democratic Congress	-0.030 (0.039)	0.017 (0.047)	-0.008 (0.068)	0.103*** (0.014)	-0.082** (0.028)
Democratic President	-0.036 (0.028)	-0.009 (0.041)	0.026 (0.018)	0.027 (0.022)	0.018 (0.033)
Partisan President	0.042 (0.028)	0.012 (0.062)	0.023 (0.046)	0.001 (0.026)	0.017 (0.043)
Ideological Match	0.071** (0.026)	0.044 (0.039)	-0.002 (0.026)	0.047*** (0.010)	0.042 (0.038)
Female	-0.005 (0.050)	-0.053 (0.050)	-0.042 (0.065)	-0.065* (0.031)	-0.015 (0.051)
Age	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.002* (0.001)	0.002 (0.003)
Veteran	-0.021 (0.042)	-0.011 (0.045)	0.019 (0.046)	0.018 (0.047)	0.055 (0.053)
Conservative	-0.020** (0.007)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.019)
Education	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.026 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.009)	-0.008 (0.027)	0.022 (0.018)
Income	0.008 (0.009)	0.001 (0.007)	0.006 (0.008)	0.006 (0.008)	0.004 (0.009)
Political Knowledge	0.036 (0.028)	-0.005 (0.026)	0.035 (0.029)	0.046* (0.022)	0.077*** (0.020)
Trust	0.040 (0.027)	0.036 (0.025)	0.036 (0.053)	0.014 (0.026)	0.071** (0.023)
Death Penalty	0.022 (0.042)	0.043 (0.037)	0.054 (0.034)	0.065+ (0.034)	0.043+ (0.022)
Nationalism	0.055*** (0.016)	0.036+ (0.021)	0.029 (0.056)	0.076** (0.028)	0.029 (0.030)
Num.Obs.	552	552	552	552	550
R2	0.071	0.060	0.041	0.091	0.160
R2 Adj.	0.036	0.025	0.005	0.057	0.129
Std.Errors	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State	by: State
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

In the following figures, we visualize the different average response among respondents with semi-elite status compared to respondents without semi-elite status.

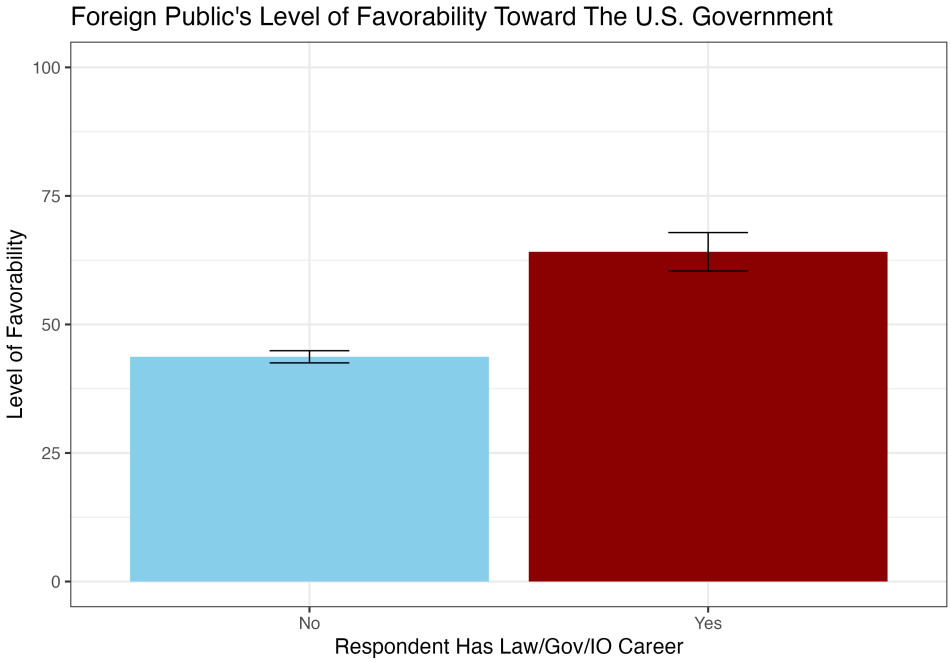

Figure G1. Effect of Law/Gov/IO Career on Binary Favorability Outcome (Aggregated Results)

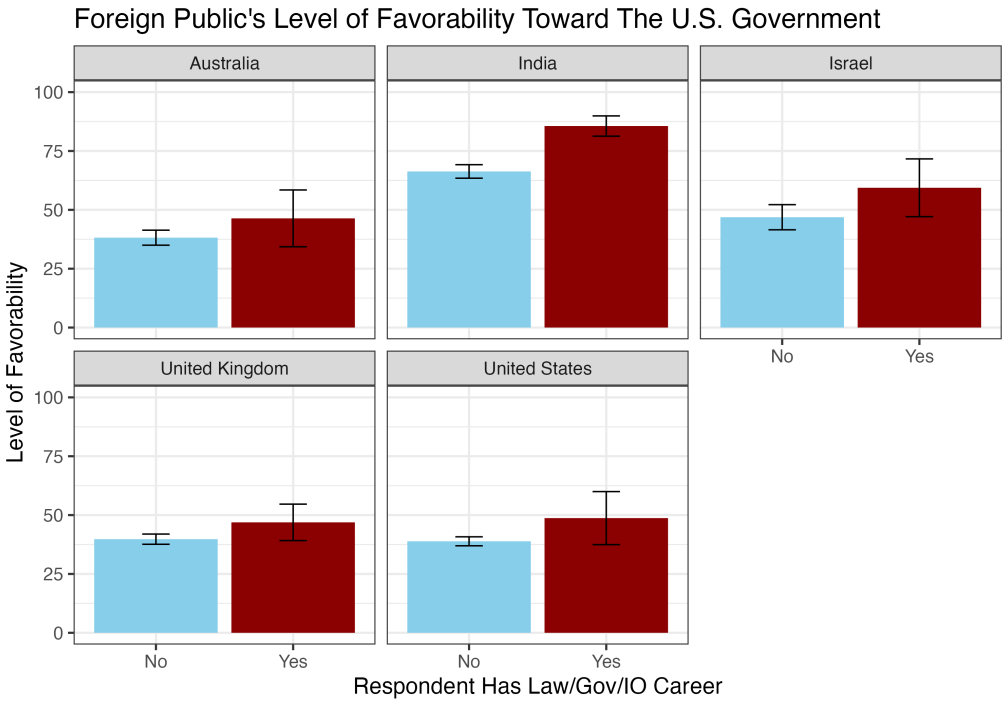

Figure G2. Effect of Law/Gov/IO Career on Binary Favorability Outcome (Country-Level Results)

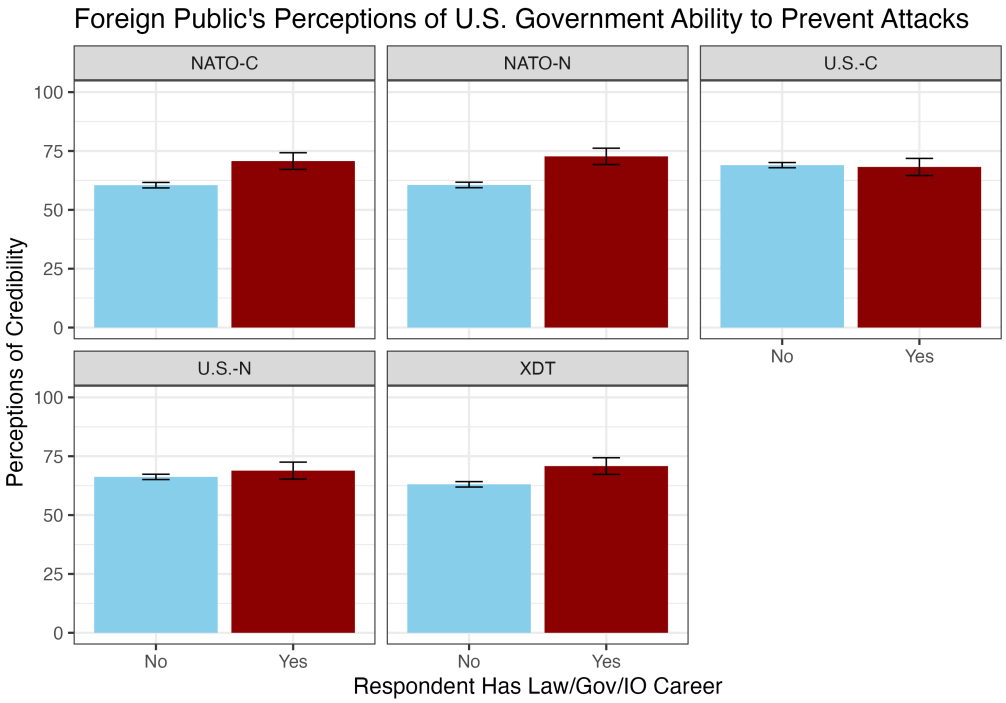

Figure G3. Effect of Law/Gov/IO Career on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Aggregated Results)

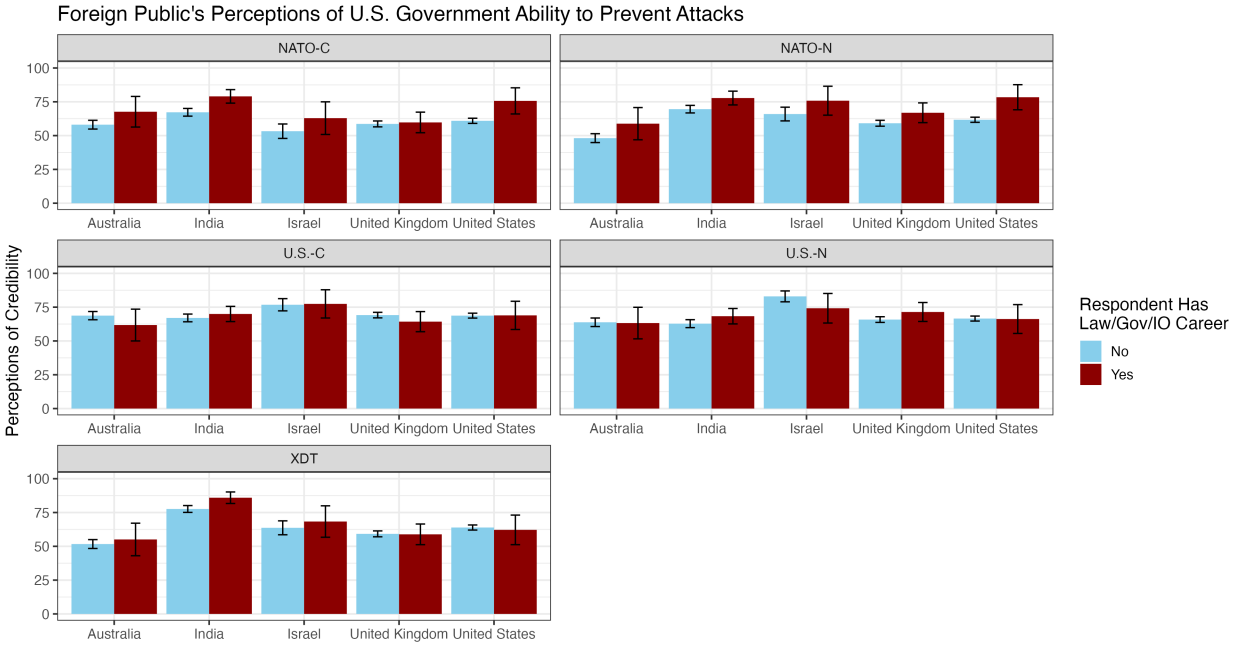

Figure G4. Effect of Law/Gov/IO Career on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Country-Level Results)

H. Heterogeneous Treatment Effect: Political Knowledge Level

Political knowledge was measured on a 4-item scale using the question: "How often do you read about politics?" The response options and their initial coding were as follows: Often (4), Sometimes (3), Infrequently (2), and Not at all (1). The median response was Sometimes (3). For the analyses in this appendix, political knowledge is rescaled into a binary of "high" and "low" political knowledge. Respondents with a self-identified political knowledge level above the median—i.e. often (4)—are labeled as "high" while those who self-identified as a political knowledge level at or below the median—i.e. Sometimes (3), Infrequently (2), and Not at all (1)—are labeled as "low" political knowledge.

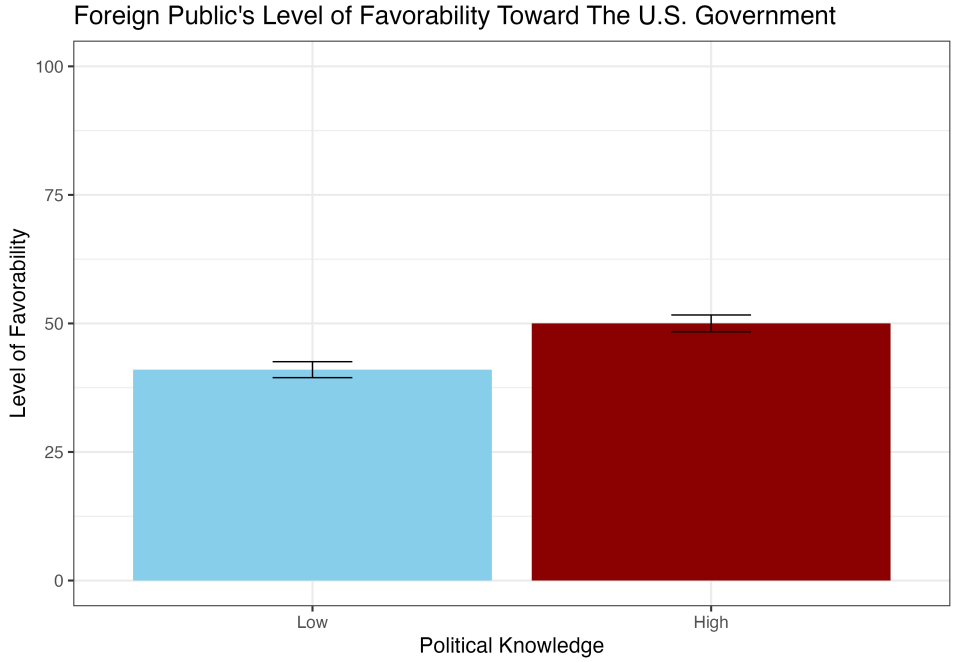

Figure H1. Effect of Political Knowledge Level on Binary Favorability Outcome (Aggregated Results)

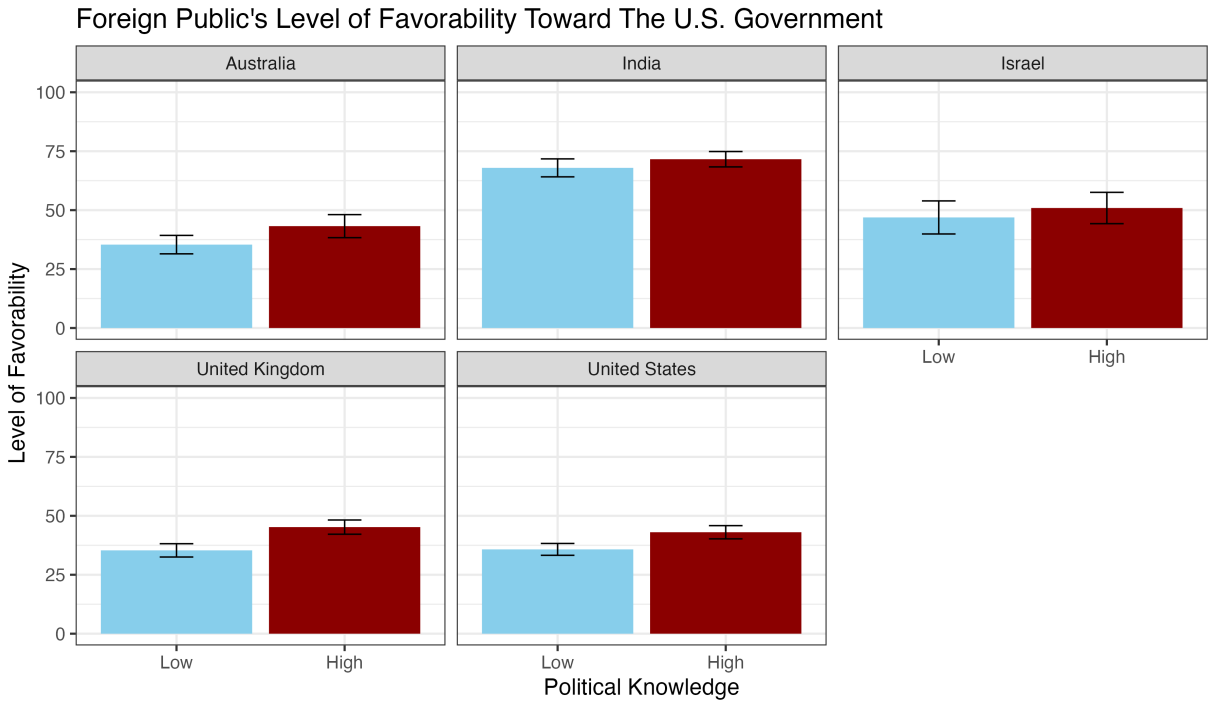

Figure H2. Effect of Political Knowledge Level on Binary Favorability Outcome (Country-Level Results)

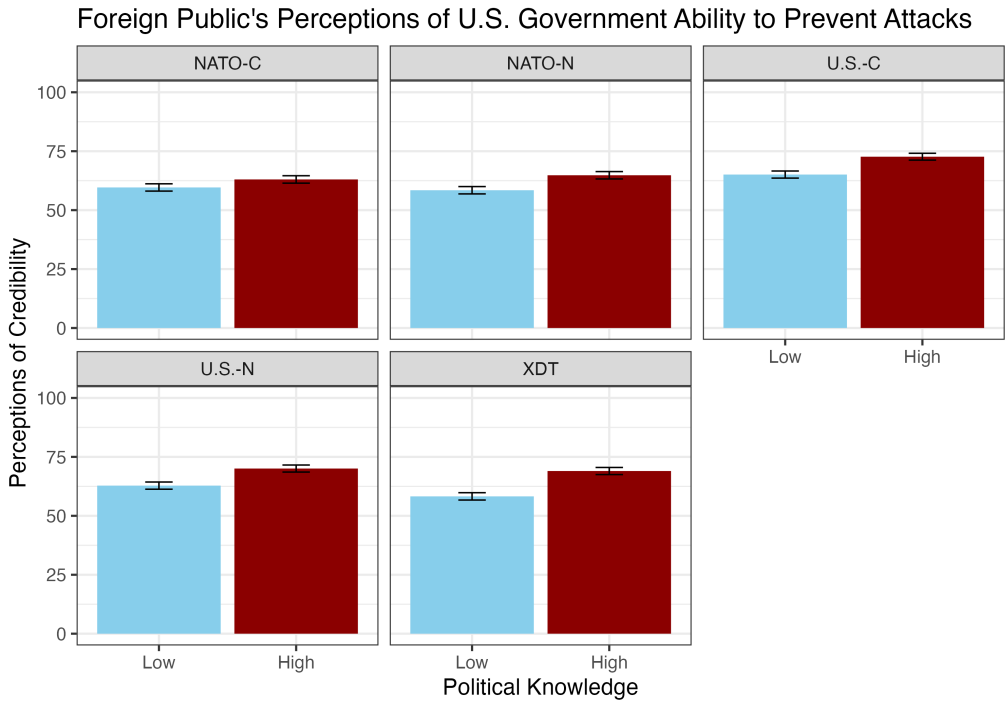

Figure H3. Effect of Political Knowledge Level on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Aggregated Results)

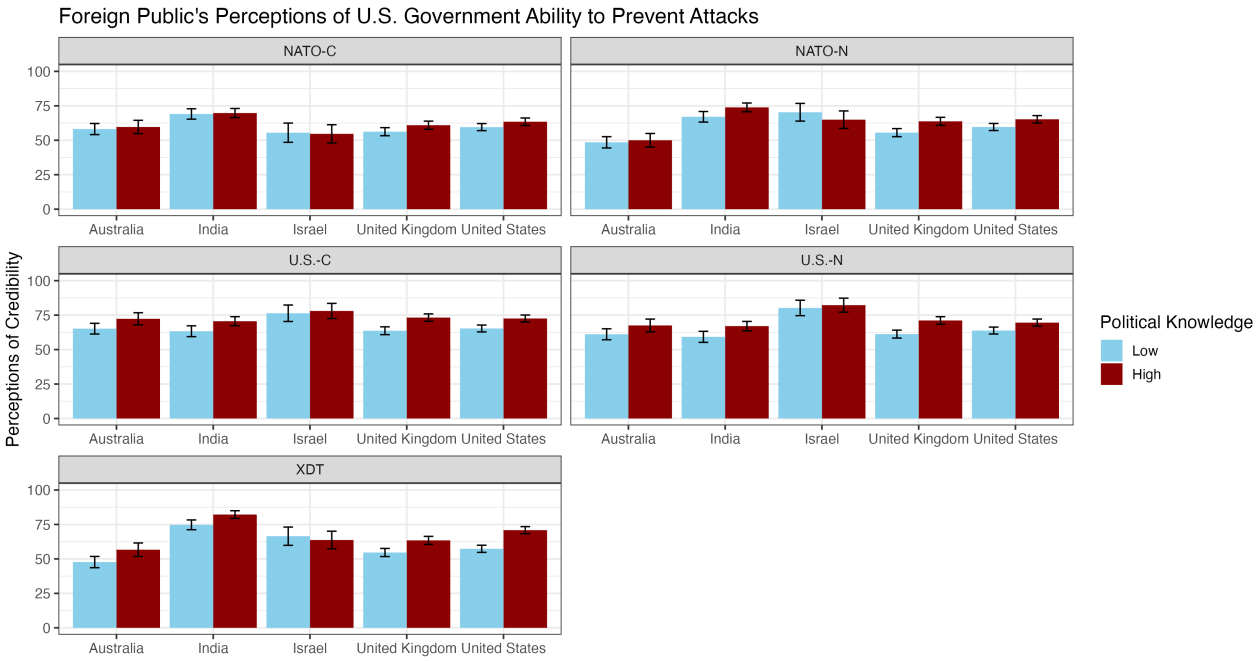

Figure H4. Effect of Political Knowledge Level on Binary Extended Deterrence Outcomes (Country-Level Results)

I. Replication Study (June 2025)

The results in our main study come from a survey that was fielded in August 2024. Given the distinct foreign policy approach of the second Trump administration, one might reasonably question whether our results extend to the present political environment. As such, we fielded a minimally adapted[18] version of the survey to respondents in the United Kingdom (N=790) and in the United States (N=800) in late June 2025. We recruited a representative sample, based on age, gender, and political party, through the survey platform Prolific.

Sample Descriptive Statistics

Table I1. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Country

Country	Count
United Kingdom	790
United States	800

Table I2. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Veteran Status

Veteran	Count
No	1504
Yes	80
I prefer not to answer.	6

Table I3. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Monthly Income Level

Income	Count
0 – 1,000 GBP	181
1,001 – 2,000 GBP	312
2,001 – 3,000 GBP	335
3,001 – 4,000 GBP	211
4,001 – 5,000 GBP	165
5,001 – 6,000 GBP	82
6,001 – 7,000 GBP	62
7,001 – 8,000 GBP	45
$>$ 8,000 GBP	144
I prefer not to answer.	53

18. We scaled down the number of questions in our June 2025 survey compared to the August 2024 survey that we present in the main paper. In Appendix J, we denote the questions that appeared only in the August 2024 survey with an asterisk.

Table I4. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Ideology

Ideology	Count
A little conservative	172
A little liberal	230
Conservative	259
Liberal	344
Moderate	324
Very conservative	79
Very liberal	174
I prefer not to answer.	8

Table I5. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Semi-Elite Status

Semi-Elite	Count
No	1453
Yes	119
I prefer not to answer.	18

Table I6. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Education Level

Education	Count
Elementary	1
Lower Secondary	50
Upper Secondary	441
Associate Degree	168
Bachelor's Degree	598
Graduate Degree, e.g., Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree	327
I prefer not to answer.	5

Table I7. Descriptive Statistics: Respondents By Political Knowledge Level

Reading Politics Freq.	Count
Not at all	13
Infrequently	101
Sometimes	577
Often	899

Replication Results

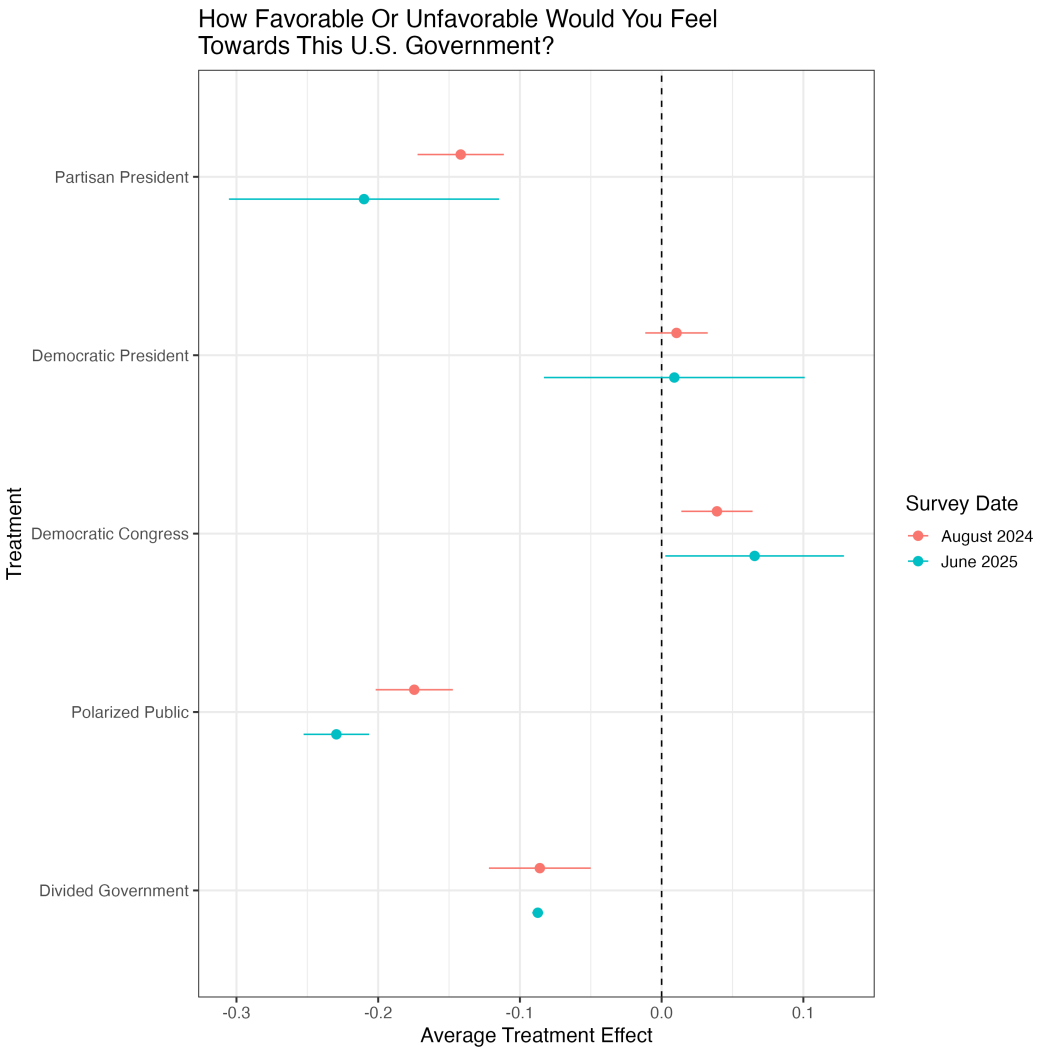

Figure I1. Comparing Original and Replication Results: General Support For The U.S. Government

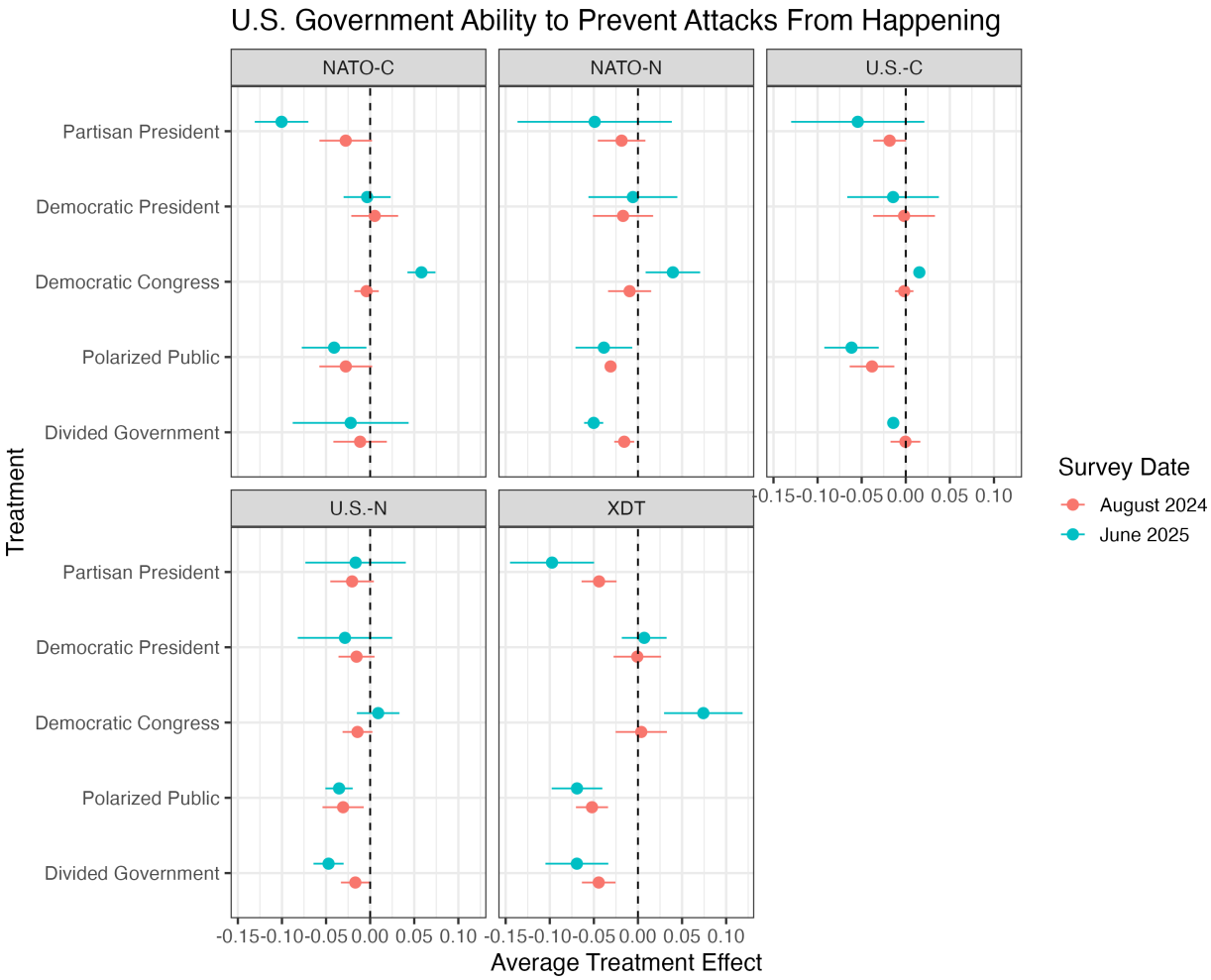

Figure I2. Comparing Original and Replication Results: Perceptions of U.S. Extended Deterrence

J. Survey Instrument

The survey text below reflects the text read by U.K. respondents. Spelling was adjusted by location (e.g., "polarisation" was used in the U.K., and "polarization" was used in the U.S.) If the content of a question differed by fielding location, this is described in the footnotes. Full translations are available upon request. Please note that the June 2025 replication of our main August 2024 survey was shorter. We denote items that appeared only in the August 2024 survey with a bolded asterisk **(*)**. For each survey item, we provide the variable name and recode values used in our replication materials.

Consent

Foreign Policy Survey

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study to enhance understanding of public preferences on foreign policy. You will be asked to answer questions on a survey, which will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to discontinue participation at any time. The alternative is not to participate.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks or benefits associated with this study.

PRIVACY: The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. All information that you provide will be anonymous.

CONTACT: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, write to the Protocol Director at [REDACTED].

Do you wish to participate in this study?

Options:
Yes. I wish to participate in this study and consent to all of the above (1),
No. I do not wish to participate in this study and do not consent to all of the above (0)

State

In which country do you currently live?

Options:
Australia*,
China*,
India*,
Israel*,
Taiwan*,
United Kingdom,
United States,
None of these

Citizen

Are you a citizen of this country?

Options:
Yes (1),
No (0)

Captcha

Are you a robot?

Knowledge

How often do you read about politics?

Options:
Often (4),
Sometimes (3),
Infrequently (2),
Not at all (1)

Agree

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- Generally speaking, my country can trust other countries.
- Anyone that kills my fellow citizens deserves to be killed.
- My citizenship is important to my identity.

Options (binary):
Highly agree (1),
Somewhat agree (1),
Somewhat disagree (0),
Highly disagree (0)

Options (continuous):
Highly agree (4),
Somewhat agree (3),
Somewhat disagree (2),
Highly disagree (1)

DemoInfo

Now, we are going to ask you some questions about yourself. After this, we will ask you more questions about international politics.

Age

What year were you born?

Options:
(Respondents were shown a drop-down list of years.)

Gender

I am...

Options:
Female (1),
Male (0),
A different gender (NA),
I prefer not to answer (NA)

Veteran

Have you ever served in the military?

Options:
Yes (1),
No (0),
I prefer not to answer (NA)

Ideology

Which political ideology most closely matches your own?

Options:
Very liberal (1),
Liberal (2),
A little liberal (3),
Moderate (4),
A little conservative (5),
Conservative (6),
Very conservative (7),
I prefer not to answer (NA)

Semi-Elite

Do you work in law, national security, government, or international organisations?

Options:
Yes (1),
No (0),
I prefer not to answer (NA)

Education

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Options:[19]
Elementary (1),
Lower Secondary (2),
Upper Secondary (3),
Associate Degree (4),
Bachelor's Degree (5),
Graduate Degree, e.g., Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree (6),
I prefer not to answer (NA)

Income

Please give us your best estimate of your average monthly income.

Options:[20]
0 – 1,000 GBP (1),
1,001 – 2,000 GBP (2),
2,001 – 3,000 GBP (3),
3,001 – 4,000 GBP (4),
4,001 – 5,000 GBP (5),
5,001 – 6,000 GBP (6),
6,001 – 7,000 GBP (7),
7,001 – 8,000 GBP (8),
$>$ 8,000 GBP (9),
I prefer not to answer (NA)

Attention Check

We want to make sure that you are still paying attention. Please read the following question carefully. Incorrect answers may terminate the survey.

Is the following true or false? The year 1920 came before the year 1910.

Options:
True (1),
False (0)

InfoPresident*

Please carefully read the following information about three topics in U.S. politics. You will be asked questions about this information. Incorrect answers may terminate the survey.

19. Respondents were given different options in different states. Translations are available upon request.
20. Respondents were given different options in different states. Translations are available upon request.

Foreign Policy: The United States' foreign policy is decided by both Congress and the president. The U.S. president can negotiate treaties, but they are approved by Congress. The president is the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. military. Some experts say the president could use force to protect an ally without waiting for approval from the U.S. Congress.

Political Parties: There are two political parties in the United States: Democrats and Republicans. Democrats are liberal, and Republicans are conservative. Sometimes, the president belongs to the same party as the one that holds the majority of Congressional seats. This is called a unified government. Other times, the president belongs to a different party than the one that holds the majority of Congressional seats. This is called a divided government.

Partisanship and Polarisation: Some politicians are moderate, meaning that their beliefs are mainstream. Other politicians are very partisan, meaning that their beliefs are extreme. Recently, polarisation in the United States has been high, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are very different. At other times, polarisation has been low, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are more similar.

In a divided government, is the president's political party the same as or different from the party with the majority of the seats in Congress?*****

Options:
Same (0),
Different (1)

InfoCongress*

Please carefully read the following information about three topics in U.S. politics. You will be asked questions about this information. Incorrect answers may terminate the survey.

Foreign Policy: The United States' foreign policy is decided by both Congress and the president. The U.S. president can negotiate treaties, but they are approved by Congress. Only Congress has the power to declare war. Some experts say the president would need approval from the U.S. Congress before using force to protect an ally.

Political Parties: There are two political parties in the United States: Democrats and Republicans. Democrats are liberal, and Republicans are conservative. Sometimes, the president belongs to the same party as the one that holds the majority of Congressional seats. This is called a unified government. Other times, the president belongs to a different party than the one that holds the majority of Congressional seats. This is called a divided government.

Partisanship and Polarisation: Some politicians are moderate, meaning that their beliefs are mainstream. Other politicians are very partisan, meaning

that their beliefs are extreme. Recently, polarisation in the United States has been high, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are very different. At other times, polarisation has been low, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are more similar.

In a divided government, is the president's political party the same as or different from the party with the majority of the seats in Congress?*****

Options:
Same (0),
Different (1)

InfoBoth*

Please carefully read the following information about three topics in U.S. politics. You will be asked questions about this information. Incorrect answers may terminate the survey.

Foreign Policy: The United States' foreign policy is decided by both Congress and the president. The U.S. president can negotiate treaties, but they are approved by Congress. The president is the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. military. Only Congress has the power to declare war. Some experts say the president could use force to protect an ally without waiting for approval from the U.S. Congress. Other experts say the president would need approval from the U.S. Congress before using force to protect an ally.

Political Parties: There are two political parties in the United States: Democrats and Republicans. Democrats are liberal, and Republicans are conservative. Sometimes, the president belongs to the same party as the one that holds the majority of Congressional seats. This is called a unified government. Other times, the president belongs to a different party than the one that holds the majority of Congressional seats. This is called a divided government.

Partisanship and Polarisation: Some politicians are moderate, meaning that their beliefs are mainstream. Other politicians are very partisan, meaning that their beliefs are extreme. Recently, polarisation in the United States has been high, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are very different. At other times, polarisation has been low, meaning that the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans are more similar.

In a divided government, is the president's political party the same as or different from the party with the majority of the seats in Congress?*****

Options:
Same (0),
Different (1)

InfoPolar*

If Republicans and Democrats hold very different beliefs, is polarisation low or high?*

Options:
Low (0),
High (1)

InfoManipulation*

Would the president need to secure approval from Congress before using force in defense of an ally?*

Options:
Definitely yes (4),
Probably yes (3),
Probably not (2),
Definitely not (1)

InfoReliable*

The United States has promised to protect [*Respondent's Country*] if it is attacked.[21] How reliable or unreliable is this promise?*

Options (binary):
Very reliable (1),
Somewhat reliable (1),
Neither reliable nor unreliable (0),
Somewhat unreliable (0),
Very unreliable (0)

Options (continuous):
Very reliable (5),
Somewhat reliable (4),
Neither reliable nor unreliable (3),
Somewhat unreliable (2),
Very unreliable (1)

InfoFail*

Your answers were incorrect. Please re-read the information and answer the questions carefully. If you get the answers wrong again, you will be asked to exit the survey.*[22]

21. U.S. respondents read "its allies."

22. This is displayed if InfoPresident = 0, InfoCongress = 0, InfoBoth = 10 or InfoPolar = 0. Respondents who see this question are then re-assigned randomization and shown the previous questions (from InfoPresident through InfoReliable) again. Respondents who fail the comprehension checks a second time are then terminated from the survey.

Treatment

Imagine that it is the year 2028. The United States has a **(Republican/Democratic)** president who is **(moderate/very partisan)**, meaning that the president's beliefs are (mainstream/extreme). The majority party in Congress is the **(Republicans/Democrats)**, meaning that there is **(unified/divided)** government. The U.S. public is **(highly/not very)** polarised, meaning that the gap between the beliefs of Democrats and Republicans is (big/small).

How favorable or unfavorable would you feel towards this U.S. government?

Options (binary):
Very favorable (1),
Somewhat favorable (1),
Neither favorable nor unfavorable (0),
Somewhat unfavorable (0),
Very unfavorable (0)

Options (continuous):
Very favorable (5),
Somewhat favorable (4),
Neither favorable nor unfavorable (3),
Somewhat unfavorable (2),
Very unfavorable (1)

Sliders

We are now going to ask you some questions about your opinions on the foreign policy of this U.S. government. Please select the appropriate option on the following sliding scales. This U.S. government's foreign policy would be...

- **(1)** Extreme... Moderate **(5)**
- **(1)** Hawkish (Militarily Aggressive)... Dovish (Militarily Passive) **(5)**

NuclearCred

Please keep in mind the following scenario:

- The U.S. has a **(Republican/Democratic)** president.
- The U.S. president is **(moderate/very partisan)**.
- The majority party in Congress is the **(Republicans/Democrats)**.
- There is **(unified/divided)** government.
- The U.S. public is **(highly/not very)** polarised.

You will now be asked to evaluate how this U.S. government might respond to various risks related to nuclear weapons. The United States has promised to protect [*Respondent's Country*] against nuclear threats.[23] How reliable or unreliable would this promise be?

23. U.S. respondents read "its allies".

Options (binary):
Very reliable (1),
Somewhat reliable (1),
Neither reliable nor unreliable (0),
Somewhat unreliable (0),
Very unreliable (0)

Options (continuous):
Very reliable (5),
Somewhat reliable (4),
Neither reliable nor unreliable (3),
Somewhat unreliable (2),
Very unreliable (1)

Open-Cred

Why do you think this promise would (or would not) be reliable? Please explain your thinking with a full and detailed answer.

Options: [Open-Ended]

Deter

This is your final reminder of the scenario. Please recall that:

- The U.S. has a **(Republican/Democratic)** president.
- The U.S. president is **(moderate/very partisan)**.
- The majority party in Congress is the **(Republicans/Democrats)**.
- There is **(unified/divided)** government.
- The U.S. public is **(highly/not very)** polarised.

How likely or unlikely is it that this U.S. government would be able to prevent the following events from happening?

- Nuclear attacks against any NATO member, including [*Respondent's Country*][24]
- Non-nuclear, armed attacks against any NATO member, including [*Respondent's Country*][25]
- Nuclear attacks against the United States
- Non-nuclear, armed attacks against the United States

Options (binary):
Very likely (1),
Somewhat likely (1),
Somewhat unlikely (0),
Very unlikely (0)

24. U.S. respondents read "such as the United Kingdom or Poland."
25. U.S. respondents read "such as the United Kingdom or Poland."

Options (continuous):
Very likely (4),
Somewhat likely (3),
Somewhat unlikely (2),
Very unlikely (1)

Open-DT

Why do you think this U.S. government would (or would not) be able to prevent nuclear attacks against NATO? Please explain your thinking with a full and detailed answer.

Options: [Open-Ended]

Conclusion

PRIVACY NOTICE: Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. All information that you have provided will be anonymous. If you wish to withdraw from the study at this time, please write to the Protocol Director at [REDACTED]. Withdrawal will result in the deletion of all data that you have provided. Do you have any additional questions or comments?

Options: [Open-Ended]