

Stanton Nuclear Security Fellows Seminar

PANEL 1: Nuclear Weapons and Governance

1. Caleb Pomeroy, CISAC

How the Bomb Shapes Leaders: The Psychology of Power, Prestige, and Security

How does possession of nuclear weapons affect leader psychology? Drawing on advances in psychological research on power, I expect that possession of nuclear weapons activates a sense of power over other countries, as well as a modest increase in the sense of prestige. Further, I expect possession of nuclear weapons to exert no effect on the sense of security among leaders, a result explained in part by the ways in which the sense of power inflates threat perception. If true, these findings would suggest that the exact weapons that proffer state security are ineffective at proffering a sense of security among leaders. Among other implications, this helps to explain the puzzling continuance of threat perception and security competition among nuclear armed powers, even though nuclear weapons are the ultimate tools of deterrence.¹

Extant psychological IR research focuses on the ways in which leader-level characteristics interact with nuclear weapons to generate foreign policy outcomes. For example, McDermott argues that personalist leaders, like Kim Jung Un, display higher levels of impulsiveness and vengefulness that make deterrence harder than rationalist models would predict.² In contrast, my argument reverses the standard causal arrow in psychological IR, suggesting that possession of nuclear weapons shapes leaders in a “first image reversed” fashion. That is, all leaders become a little bit more like Kim Jung Un under conditions of felt power. Cohen’s work is perhaps the closest forerunner to my argument.³ Cohen argues that leaders of newfound nuclear powers authorize assertive foreign policies until those leaders experience the fear of potential nuclear war themselves, after which they become less belligerent. My work predicts longer lasting psychological effects than Cohen’s theory, offers a more comprehensive accounting of the

¹ Lieber, Keir A., and Daryl G. Press “The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence.” *International Security* 41, no. 4 (2017): 9-49.

² McDermott, Rose “Psychology, Leaders, and New Deterrence Dilemmas” in *The Fragile Balance of Terror: Deterrence in the New Nuclear Age*, Vipin Narang and Scott D. Sagan (eds) Cornell University Press (2023): 39-62.

³ Cohen, Michael D. *When Proliferation Causes Peace: The Psychology of Nuclear Crises*. Georgetown University Press, 2017.

psychological effects of nuclear weapons, links Cohen's finding to the psychology of power, and uncovers a more puzzling threat inflation effect that flows from that power.

My project intervenes in the above literature with a straightforward intuition: nuclear weapons endow foreign policy elites with incredible material power, and this power changes those elites. Think adages like "power corrupts." Specifically, social psychological research shows that power is a feeling and experience that changes individuals. The leading theory is the approach-inhibition theory of power, which maintains that the feeling of power activates human "approach" tendencies, whereas the feeling of weakness activates "avoidance" tendencies.⁴ Our approach tendencies include effects like confidence, resolve, and aggression. Our avoidance tendencies include effects like hesitance, empathy, and thoughtfulness. Psychologists find that power activates these effects across experimental and observational studies and in samples that range from everyday individuals to high-level corporate and government elites.

Adapting this work to the setting of foreign policy, I expect that nuclear weapons activate a sense of power and prestige but do not affect the sense of security.⁵ The lattermost effect is the most surprising possibility. Psychologists show that the sense of power activates intuitive, emotional, and heuristic cognition that is more likely to inflate threat assessments. By contrast, the feeling of weakness activates deliberative, dispassionate, and rational cognition that is less likely to inflate threat assessments.

I focus primarily on the relationships between nuclear and non-nuclear powers, since the psychological effects of power derive from asymmetric capabilities. There are two obvious ways to examine the effects of nuclear weapons on decisionmakers. First, one might examine decisionmaker psychology before and after development of an effective nuclear capability, like the Truman administration before and after development of the bomb. Second, one might examine leader tendencies in the context of nuclear weapons discussions relative to conventional weapons discussions. In essence, when "all options are on the table," nuclear weapons are on the mind. How does decisionmaker psychology change? I believe the latter analytical strategy is more promising, because psychologists show that the feeling of power is dynamic. The feeling of power can ebb and flow anytime that nuclear weapons are salient, such that nuclear weapons exert psychological effects well beyond their initial period of development.

⁴ Keltner, Dacher, Deborah H. Gruenfeld, and Cameron Anderson. "Power, Approach, and Inhibition." *Psychological Review* 110, no. 2 (2003): 265.

⁵ See, for example, Magee, Joe C., and Adam D. Galinsky. "Social Hierarchy: The Self-Reinforcing Nature of Power and Status." *The Academy of Management Annals* 2, no. 1 (2008): 351-398; Mooijman, M., Van Dijk, W.W., Ellemers, N. and Van Dijk, E., 2015. "Why Leaders Punish: A Power Perspective." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 109(1), p.75.

To examine the psychological effects of nuclear weapons on decisionmakers, I turn to (1) a large-scale text analysis of internal US foreign policy documents during the Cold War and (2) original archival research centered on a historical case or cases. Here, I outline preliminary evidence from the text analysis of US elites. I fit a “word embedding” model to all available documents in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* during the Cold War (that is, the Truman administration through the available documents in the Reagan administration). The *FRUS* represents the official documentary historical record of major US foreign policy decisions and diplomatic activity. The documents were often previously classified and commonly originate from cabinet settings and communications with US diplomatic missions. The embedding model measures the use of every unique term in the corpus relative to every other unique term, akin to a geographic map. I define dictionaries of terms to locate discussions of nuclear weapons use, conventional weapons use, and the main theoretical constructs of the sense of power, prestige, and security.⁶

The preliminary results are the following. First, US elites are more likely to exhibit a sense of US power and slightly more likely to exhibit a sense of US prestige in the context of nuclear weapons discussions (relative to conventional weapons discussions). More surprisingly, US elites are no more or less likely to exhibit a sense of US security in discussions of nuclear (relative to conventional) weapons. I further find that the sense of power helps to explain the lack of relationship between nuclear weapons and the sense of security. This puzzling result finds face-level confirmation in close readings of the underlying texts. For example, a top-secret memorandum from December 1950 written by Oliver Clubb, Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs, explains that “It would be relapsing into a Maginot Line philosophy to judge ourselves quite secure at home by reason of our stockpile of atomic bombs: the next ‘Pearl Harbor’ may be even more surprising than the last.”⁷ Of course, “Maginot Line philosophy” refers to defensive abilities that inspire a false sense of security, suggesting a more complicated story between nuclear weapons and felt security at the elite level.

These results suggest a straightforward policy implication: nuclear weapons are considered the ultimate tools of state security, but the sense of power activated by these weapons might interfere with the sense of greater security. This helps to explain the persistence of threat perception and security competition among nuclear armed states. To counteract this effect, decisionmakers should be aware that power can “go to our heads” in ways that obstruct prudent decisionmaking. In short, think like the weak – more deliberately and more empathetically.

⁶ Nuclear weapons terms: **nuke, atom, nuclear, bomb**; Conventional weapons terms: **infantry, ammo, airpow, airstrik, naval, battleship**; Sense of power terms: **abl, capabl, influenc, control, stronger**; Sense of security terms: **secur, safe, invulner**; Sense of prestige terms: **status, prestig, respect**.

⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume VII, Korea*, ed. John P. Glennon (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 927.

I would appreciate feedback in at least three areas. First, I plan to conduct in-depth historical research, including an archival trip in Spring of 2024. I would appreciate any suggestions for potentially interesting cases. Second, there are different possible theoretical logics here, including the psychological effects of nuclear weapons in relation to other nuclear-armed versus non-armed states, in the context of states who retained versus gave up nuclear weapons, and so forth. My hunch is to focus on the relations of nuclear weapons states with non-nuclear powers, but I would be eager to hear any thoughts. Finally, selection effects might bias the above results, in which nuclear weapons and conventional weapons are discussed in different contexts. If so, these different strategic contexts rather than the weapons per se might do the explanatory work. I would appreciate any thoughts on these questions and the above material.

2. Thomas Fraise, MIT SSP

Restricted democracies: How Nuclear Weapons Affect Democratic States

- **On what nuclear security issue are you working and why is it important?**

My research tackles the issue of nuclear weapons' interactions with democratic government, by focusing on the development of nuclear secrecy regimes and their impact on democratic control. This issue is important for at least three reasons.

First of all, 5 out of the 9 currently nuclear-armed states qualify as democracies. Nuclear weapons, by nature, entertain a complicated relationship with democratic government, due to the destruction they can cause, the speed of their use, and the secrecy they require. This has led some authors to qualify them as "intrinsically despotic", while others have claimed, to the contrary, that nuclear weapons were democracy's savior in front of the Soviet threat. Neither of these claims has been empirically checked. My research aims to do so.

Second, nuclear secrecy is under-researched. Scholars in nuclear security studies frequently, and rightly lament the obstacle that secrecy constitutes to the study of nuclear issues, but rarely problematize it as a research object. It is, in a sense, a problem for research more than a research problem. With my research, I aim to better understand its causes, its role in national security, and its impact on policymaking.

Third, nuclear security studies have essentially focused on the effects of domestic politics on nuclear weapons choices. As a result, we know little about the effects of nuclear weapons on domestic politics. My project makes the case for the study of the domestic consequences of the nuclear revolution by turning a classic problem upside down. It is important to properly understand what nuclear weapons did to the states which acquired them.

- **What is the big question that you are seeking to answer about that issue?**

With this project, I aim to provide an answer to the question of how nuclear weapons affect democratic states. It is commonly considered that nuclear weapons require specific political arrangements to ensure security – notably, secrecy regimes designed to protect a state's technological edge, hide potential vulnerabilities, and enable the workings of deterrence. However, secrecy sits unwell with democratic government because it can prevent the democratic control of policymaking. This tension forms the basis of what I call the "nuclear-democratic question": *Are the political arrangements necessary to govern nuclear weapons compatible with democratic government?*

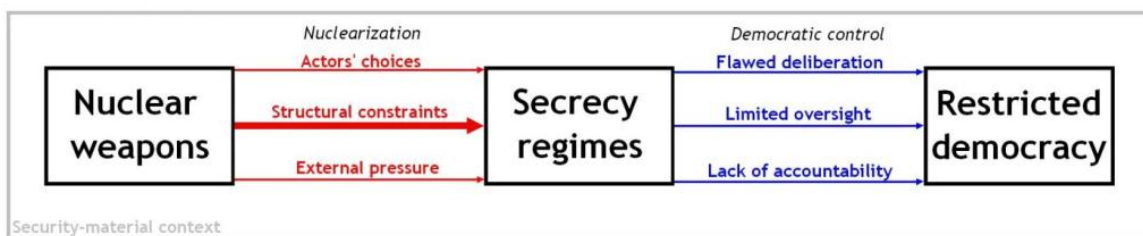
- **How are you going to answer your question? What methods will you use and what evidence or cases will you explore?**

To answer this question, I will rely on a parallel demonstration based on three qualitative and historical study of the development of nuclear secrecy regimes in three European states: the UK, from 1945 to 1958, Sweden, from 1945 to 1972, and France, from 1945 to 1974. The chronological boundaries of the inquiry were defined based on the beginning of nuclear research, up to the end of the first generation of their program – or the point of renunciation, in the Swedish case.

This project studies the origins of nuclear secrecy regimes, their development, and their effects on modes of democratic control. To measure those effects, I focused on three modes of democratic control necessary, though insufficient, for a government to be democratic: deliberation, oversight, and accountability. All three modes of control are likely to be affected by secrecy because to be effective, these modes of control require accurate information about future, present, and past state actions, their justification, and their costs.

- **What is your answer to the question you are asking? That is, what is your argument or conclusion even if it is still tentative at this point?**

Based on this, my dissertation makes the following argument: nuclear weapons restrict democratic government. Though they do not dissolve democracy altogether, they create restricted democracies because the intrinsic properties of nuclear technology create structural constraints which leads to the development of secrecy regimes that restrict the scope of democratically decidable and controllable state actions. Though “restricted democracies” are democratic in many, if not most, regards, they do not allow citizens to control what is the most important, and most consequential, domain of public choice since it entails the possibility of apocalyptic violence. My argument is summarized in the following figure:



My argument is not deterministic: I argue that, in a given security-material context where nuclear weapons have been invented, but there exist no forms of international restraints against the threat of nuclear violence, states interested in developing nuclear weapons need secrecy as a solution for security, either to protect a technological edge, conceal potential vulnerabilities which could incite a first strike, or keep their intention secret. In a world deprived of security from

nuclear violence, secrecy over nuclear knowledge become an imperative of sort. States are being *nuclearized*.

These structural constraints constitute the primary and necessary cause of nuclear secrecy regimes. It only explains, however, why states developed secrecy regimes, not how their boundaries evolved. To account for this, it is necessary to bring in two new elements. One is US diplomatic pressures against technology transfers, aimed at ensuring that US data acquired through cooperation with allies would not end up in Soviet hands and affect the US technological edge. The second is the domestic choices made by political actors, who see an opportunity to use the secrecy imperative as a resource for autonomy and a justification for the over-extension of the boundaries of secrecy. This leads to the creation of secrecy regimes that affect all three selected modes of democratic control.

First, secrecy flaws deliberation over nuclear issues, due to the possibility of avoiding deliberation, or due to the the flawed communication over costs and justifications of proposed policies. It is telling that neither of the three states studied originally deliberated over whether to acquire nuclear weapons or not. Because all things nuclear were secret, programs were allowed to start in secrecy, as long as they remained of limited size. *Second*, it also restricts oversight over policy choices, since the requirement of secrecy prevents the public at large from assessing whether the policy is going as decided or not. *Finally*, secrecy also prevents proper accountability for policy choices, and even for their human consequences. For example, the requirements for secrecy over the design of tested weapons allowed actors to develop an extreme regime of control surrounding nuclear test sites, which made possible the concealment of contamination data and prevented accountability.

In conclusion, my research shows that the development of nuclear weapons, in a democratic state, has an impact on the structures of said state and affects the public's ability to control state actions. It does not dissolve democracy altogether but restricts it.

- **How does your work fit into the existing work on your subject?**

Though no alternative explanation has been clearly articulated yet, the logical alternative would be a constructivist explanation, which would argue that secrecy over nuclear policy is the product of the securitization of nuclear issues. My answer is superior in the sense that it accounts for material factors, and therefore can explain why no state has ever decided that knowledge related to nuclear weapon production could be made public without certain precautions.

Using Daniel Deudney's historical security materialism, my argument aims to show that the effects of nuclear technology on states cannot be reduced to a matter of actors' interpretation. Rather, the security challenge posed by these new technologies is identified as the primary variable behind the actors' behaviors. In an environment where actors are offered no forms of organized

restraints against nuclear strikes, nuclear weapons do not have to be securitized: their very existence is a security challenge.

There currently exists no empirically grounded argument as to how nuclear weapons affect democratic government. There exist studies that diagnose a democratic deficit in nuclear governance but do not seek to explain it. My framework explains this democratic deficit while specifying the mechanisms that caused it. Similarly, because it is empirically grounded, it nuances claims made notably by political theorists which qualify nuclear weapons as “despotic” and nuclear-armed states as “monarchical”. A careful study of nuclear secrecy regimes shows that their effects, while significant for democratic government, do not warrant such claims.

I consider the most important contribution of my work to be the demonstration that nuclear technologies have autonomous effects on the states that acquire them well beyond the domain of security policy, and the development of a framework that allows to make them visible and to empirically seize them. Though my work focuses only on democratic states, I wish to construct an argument that could be applied to non-democratic states as well and identify how nuclear possession participated in the development of those states too. My work aims, essentially, to make visible the domestic consequences of the nuclear revolution.

- **What policy implications flow from your work? What concrete recommendations can you offer to policymakers?**

My work does not have a direct policy implication, but it offers two elements to policymakers. First, it aims to show that though nuclear weapons are not democratically governable, it is possible to govern them in a more democratic manner. Second, my work shows that the pursuit of nuclear weapons is not merely a process of technological development or weapon procurement. I argue that the pursuit of nuclear weapons is also *a process of political change* through which technology imposes its constraints on actors, affects state structures, and restricts the field of democratically decidable choices. To have, or not to have nuclear weapons, implies weighing more than strategic calculations, but also the kind of state one seeks to live in.

- **What do you think is the weakest or most vulnerable aspect of your study and what sort of feedback would be most useful to you?**

The most vulnerable aspect of my study relates to how material factors affect state structures and the causal role played by nuclear weapons in the birth of secrecy regimes. I am not convinced by constructivists’ explanation which would argue that secrecy, and the security implications of nuclear weapons, are merely the products of actors’ interpretation and that things could have unfolded differently. However, identifying the exact causal pathways through which nuclear technology, as artifacts, produces effects on states and their institutions is a problem I have not solved yet, and I would be interested in feedback related to this problem of causality.

3. James Kim, MIT SSP

Learning in Nuclear Proliferation

On what nuclear security issue are you working and why is it important?

My research centers on nuclear weapons proliferation, specifically examining the role of a global conflict in one region in triggering nuclear proliferation in other regions. This issue has gained significant prominence in both academic and policy debates following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the war sent "the worst possible message" to any state considering nuclear weapons for its security,⁸ and numerous nongovernment experts have also voiced concerns about the potential impact of this invasion on the spread of nuclear weapons.⁹

The importance of this research question lies in the widespread apprehension among individuals, experts, and decision-makers regarding the potential for the Russia-Ukraine conflict to spur nuclear proliferation worldwide. Despite these concerns, there is limited empirical evidence to ascertain whether such concerns are valid. Given that nonproliferation of nuclear weapons has been a major goal of U.S. national security policy for over half a century, it is important to investigate this puzzle and understand the real-world implications of conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war on the prospects of further nuclear proliferation.

What is the big question that you are seeking to answer about that issue?

Does a conflict in one region spur nuclear proliferation in other regions? My research seeks to answer whether individuals learn and update their beliefs about nuclear weapons from wars in other regions. Specifically, my research investigates whether invasions of non-nuclear-armed states by their nuclear-armed adversaries increase the motivation for nuclear development among individuals – both members of the public and political elites – observing from distant regions.

⁸ "So what message does this send to any country around the world that may think that it needs to have nuclear weapons to protect, to defend, to deter aggression against its sovereignty and independence? The worst possible message." Antony J. Blinken, Remarks to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference, August 1, 2022. <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinkens-remarks-to-the-nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty-review-conference/>.

⁹ Notable quotes from policy analyses include: "some non-nuclear-weapon states under threat from hostile nuclear powers may reconsider whether they need their own nuclear deterrent to guarantee their security," (Arms Control Association, October 22, 2022) and "Kennedy's prediction that the world could see up to 25 nuclear-armed states in the course of the 20th century may wind up just being premature, not wrong." (Brookings Institution, March 29, 2022)

How are you going to answer your question? What methods will you use, and what evidence or cases will you explore?

I will use survey experiments and case study methods to study both the public and political elite levels. Survey experiments will be conducted in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan to examine how the general public's perceptions and preferences for nuclear weapons change after exposure to information about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Respondents will be divided into two groups, with one group presented with information about the war, emphasizing it as a conflict between a non-nuclear state and a nuclear-armed adversary. Then, respondents will be asked about their level of support for nuclear armament in their own country. I expect the difference between the treated and control groups to be significant among individuals of the war generation who have direct wartime violence experience, while it will be less substantial among post-war generations.

Additionally, I will examine historical cases of political leaders' major public speeches regarding nuclear armament. The analysis will center on how ongoing or past foreign conflicts influenced these leaders' thoughts on the necessity of nuclear arsenals and their decisions to develop nuclear weapons. Some of the cases I plan to examine include leaders of South Korea in the 1970s, North Korea in the early 1990s and early 2000s, France in the 1950s, and Iran in the late 1990s.

What is your answer to the question you are asking? That is, what is your argument or conclusion even if it is still tentative at this point?

My central argument posits that individuals with personal experience of wartime violence are more likely to be influenced by foreign conflicts, leading them to update their preferences in favor of nuclear armament in their own country. They take the lessons from foreign conflicts more seriously due to their heightened sensitivity to military conflicts. Individuals who have direct wartime experience are more easily startled by stories and images of war even in distant locations because they can readily recall their own personal traumatic experiences with war.¹⁰ As such information is more vivid to them, it is more salient perceptually, and its lessons are therefore more persuasive.¹¹ In addition, they update their preferences in the direction of favoring nuclear armament because they are better able to empathize with the invaded country. When someone has had a similar experience, it is easier for them to relate to the circumstances they observe.¹² When individuals who have been exposed to wartime violence experience conflict vicariously,

¹⁰ "The war in Ukraine, and the disturbing stories and images dominating the news, could also bring up troubling memories for those who have lived through similar situations — a phenomenon called re-experiencing." CBS interview of World War II Survivors watching Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (March 22, 2022)

¹¹ Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 27.

¹² Carly Wayne and Yuri M. Zhukov. "Never again: The holocaust and political legacies of genocide," *World Politics* 74.3 (2022): 367-404. The authors find that individuals previously targeted by genocide become more supportive of foreign victimized groups.

they connect with a non-nuclear-armed state whose experiences resemble their own, which leads them to believe that similar conflicts could occur on their own territory. This makes them place a higher value on nuclear weapons as a deterrent against nuclear threats, with the aim of preventing similar tragedies.

How does your work fit into the existing work on your subject?

My research contributes to the understanding of the causes of nuclear weapons proliferation. Existing literature has suggested that military security motivations, such as enduring rivalries, security crises, and national humiliation, propel states toward the pursuit of nuclear weapons. For instance, historical cases such as France's development of nuclear weapons following the Suez Crisis, North Korea's nuclear program in response to U.S. nuclear threats, Israel's nuclear proliferation in light of historical events like the Holocaust and surrounding regional threats, and Iran's consideration of nuclear weapons after the Iran-Iraq War all underscore this theme. However, a considerable debate persists regarding whether the lessons drawn from conflicts in a different region can influence the decisions of non-nuclear states in other regions. Do individuals in non-nuclear states – both the general public and political leaders – facing nuclear threats learn from foreign conflicts that bear similarities to their own situations? My research aims to answer this debate.

What alternative arguments or explanations exist, and why is your answer superior?

Existing studies tend to adopt a binary approach to the question of whether learning occurs in foreign countries or not without exploring the nuanced variation in learning effects across individuals. Consequently, the empirical evidence generated by these studies remains mixed. The mainstream body of literature asserts that decision-makers draw lessons only from their own experience, ignoring the arguably relevant experience of other states. The Europeans dismissed did not learn from the field experiences of the American Civil War, and the general public in East Asian countries did not alter their views on U.S. alliance credibility following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹³ Other studies present contrasting evidence, suggesting that states do indeed draw lessons from the experiences of other states.¹⁴

My research diverges from this binary approach: foreign conflicts do not have an equal impact on all people. Instead, I argue that certain types of individuals are more likely to be affected by

¹³ Jay Luvaas, *The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance* (University Press of Kansas, 1988). D.G. Kim, Joshua Byun, Jiyoung Ko. "Remember Kabul? Reputation, strategic contexts, and American credibility after the Afghanistan withdrawal," *Cotemporary Security Policy* (2023), Online First.

¹⁴ For example, lessons about regime changes and domestic political conflict are likely to be drawn from the experiences of other nations. See Colin J. Bennet, "How States Utilize Foreign Evidence," *Journal of Public Policy* 11 (1991): 31-54. Stuart Hall and Donald Rothchild, "The Contagion of Political Conflict in Africa and the World," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 30 (1986): 716-735.

observing such events and are thus more prone to updating their beliefs and perceptions about nuclear weapons based on the lessons derived from these conflicts. My answer underscores the role of individuals' previous experiences with warfare in shaping their sensitivity and connectivity to foreign wars.

How does your work add to or change our understanding of the issue you are studying?

My research broadens our understanding of the individual dimension of nuclear policy preferences. Existing scholarship has explored various factors contributing to divergent behaviors and preferences regarding nuclear policy under similar security conditions. For instance, previous research has emphasized the impact of rebel experience and the psychology of leaders in influencing nuclear proliferation decisions.¹⁵ Furthermore, demographic variables like gender, age, and political partisanship have been identified as factors affecting public support for the use of nuclear weapons.¹⁶ My research highlights the significance of personal experiences with warfare, which condition a learning effect of global conflicts on preferences for nuclear proliferation.

What do you see as your most important contribution?

My research addresses the debate about learning in nuclear proliferation, specifically the transferability of lessons from global conflicts across geographical boundaries. Existing evidence is mixed, with some individuals learning from and applying other states' experiences to their own country's situation, while others disregard such lessons due to perceived geographical differences. My research emphasizes the variations in individuals' ability to draw lessons from global events based on their personal experiences. Despite its real-world significance, scholars often lack baseline expectations for the extent to which global conflicts may shape the desire for nuclear weapons in other parts of the world. My research takes a step forward by investigating how the Russia-Ukraine conflict impacts East Asia.

What policy implications flow from your work? What concrete recommendations can you offer to policymakers?

My research provides practical takeaways for U.S. nuclear policymakers in the aftermath of the Russian War on Ukraine. The war has ignited debates regarding its potential to spur nuclear proliferation in other regions. Particularly in East Asia, one of the regions that are perceived as

¹⁵ Matthew Fuhrmann and Michael Horowitz, "When leaders matter: Rebel experience and nuclear proliferation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54 (2015): 831-859. K. P. O'Reilly, "Leaders' Perceptions and Nuclear Proliferation: A Political Psychology Approach to Proliferation," *Political Psychology* 33 (2012): 767-789.

¹⁶ Daryl Press, Scott Sagan, and Benjamin Valentino, "Atomic aversion: Experimental evidence on taboos, traditions, and the non-use of nuclear weapons," *American Political Science Review* 107 (2013): 188-206. Scott Sagan and Benjamin Valentino, "Revisiting Hiroshima in Iran: what Americans really think about using nuclear weapons and killing noncombatants," *International Security* 42 (2017): 41-79.

vulnerable to proliferation, the leadership has transitioned from war-generation leaders to post-war generations in the recent decade. The evidence that the conflict primarily affects people who have experienced wartime violence firsthand while having little to no impact on those without such experience would imply that the new leadership in this region may not have learned much from the Ukraine conflict in favor of pursuing independent nuclear armament. This would suggest that the proliferation pessimism – that the global nonproliferation order may collapse following Russia's invasion of Ukraine – may be, to some extent, baseless.

What do you think is the weakest or most vulnerable aspect of your study, and what sort of feedback would be most useful to you?

One potential vulnerability in my study is the role of public opinion in nuclear proliferation. Unlike other areas of national security policy, nuclear programs are characterized by a high degree of secrecy, resulting in an informational imbalance between political elites and the public. It is commonly believed that the influence of public opinion on actual nuclear policy decisions is limited. Therefore, feedback on the plausibility of understanding public opinion on nuclear proliferation would be valuable.