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NUCLEAR WEAPONS, PROTEST, AND AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES, 1944-2020

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Abstract. Nuclear weapons and protest have had a longstanding connection in the United States since the end of World War II. This research investigates the reciprocal relationship between US political parties' positions on nuclear weapons and media coverage of international anti-nuclear protest. In doing so, it considers the interactive effects of parties and protests, variations in the dangers of nuclear weapons, and the effects of presidential incumbency. The results reveal that the Democratic Party may be more responsive to protests than is the Republican Party, though protesters likely react more directly to positions taken by the Republican Party. Further, the evolution of anti-nuclear discourse from arms control to proliferation does not appear to have advantaged the international anti-nuclear movement. The article concludes with lessons on how the anti-nuclear movement could approach key issues and the two major US political parties.

Introduction

Almost 80 years have passed since nuclear weapons were detonated on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While these weapons have not again been used against an enemy in wartime, their continued existence and readiness poses tremendous danger to humanity and the natural environment. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, nine nations together possessed more than 12,000 nuclear warheads as of January 2023, with nearly 10,000 of these being potentially operational (Kristensen & Korda, 2023, p. 247). The United States and Russia alone controlled approximately 89 percent of this total nuclear stockpile (Kristensen & Korda, 2023, p. 248). The risk is ever present that the nuclear club will proliferate to a larger coterie of nations or

non-state entities, as countries such as Libya, Syria, and Iran have at times given indications that they seek to become nuclear-armed states (Narang, 2022). Thus, the status quo reflects the threat of what at least one scholar has labeled as "unparalleled catastrophe" (Crilley, 2023).

Given that the United States is one of the world's two dominant nuclear states, it is urgent to understand the political forces that shape the American posture on this issue. Both major political parties have voiced support for substantial increases in investments in nuclear weapons, although the issue was certainly not at the forefront of the 2024 presidential campaign.

Anti-nuclear activism has an extensive history. Some of the earliest opposition to nuclear weapons was first expressed in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, established in 1945 by Eugene Rabinowitch and Hyman Goldsmith (Solomon, 1983). By the late 1950s, grassroots advocacy organizations – such as the American Friends Service Committee and the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (known as SANE) in the United States – had begun mobilizing against the bomb in conjunction with a campaign to ban the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons, along with other issues. Arms control was injected into US national electoral politics by the 1960s, especially as organizations such as SANE and Women Strike for Peace adeptly articulated the risks of nuclear weapons (Eastwood, 2020). Anti-nuclear protests became even more widely visible worldwide in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly during the Nuclear Freeze campaigns (Meyer, 1990). This social movement transcended national boundaries and was passionately embraced in places such as Western Europe and the Pacific. However, the anti-nuclear movement has been mostly in abeyance since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Rubinson, 2018) as public attention to the risks of nuclear weapons has declined (Lytle & Karl, 2020). Charting a path

for a peaceful and secure future would benefit from understanding more about the political consequences of this past mobilization and demobilization.

This study focuses on political parties as one vital institutional arena over which anti-nuclear activists strive to exert influence. It investigates the extent to which there is a relationship between citizen activism and the policy positions of US political parties. American political parties are coalitions of policy demanders that attempt to control a portfolio of salient issues (Cohen, Karol, Noel, & Zaller, 2008). Parties certainly do not *determine* policy, as the president and other state actors hold greater sway over policy. However, parties have an important voice in the policy process, especially as they put forth platforms prior to each presidential election that prescribe an agenda should their nominated candidate win the presidency. Parties use their platforms as critical tools to respond to fluctuations in public opinion (Benefiel & Williams, 2019). While these positions exhibit a certain degree of stability, they also offer opportunities for change (and, thus, influence) over time (Karol, 2009).

Prior research on the politics of American nuclear policy has explored both partisan and nonpartisan elements of protest cycles. Meyer (1993) documented that early debates on the issue were largely technical and nonpartisan. It was not until the candidacy and presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s that the nuclear weapons debate became highly partisan – especially during the 1984 presidential election. The research undertaken in the current article focuses on the language of party positions in platforms, which exhibits differences between the parties from very early in the nuclear age. That is, while presidents and other party leaders have not always set nuclear policy differentially across parties (in keeping with the old maxim that "party politics stops at the water's edge" (Vandenberg,

1947)), the evidence in this study reflects that partisan talk and thinking on foreign and military policies have long differed between the two major parties.

This research examines political party platforms in the United States from 1944 to 2020 in order to understand party positions on nuclear weapons. Platforms are one of numerous indicators of a party's policy stances. Earlier scholarship has shown that organized interests pursue inclusion of their goals in party platforms, while parties sometimes reward loyalists and ideological allies through platform modifications (Victor & Reinhardt, 2018). This study investigates the relationship between party positions and activism indicated by the mass media attention to anti-nuclear protest. While protest is not the only form of activism, it is the most-commonly-used activist tactic that is also easily transparent to the public. As a result, it is possible to track protest over time more reliably than is the case for other aspects of activism.

The article acknowledges that the relationship between party positions and protests may be reciprocal – that is, protests may affect positions at the same time that positions affect protests (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). Additionally, the research explores the potential effects of (1) differences between the Democratic and Republican parties, (2) issue evolution in discourses about nuclear weapons, and (3) variations in the institutional concerns of incumbent versus challenging parties. In doing so, this analysis provides insights into the ways that parties and protests do – and do not – respond to one another.

This article proceeds in six parts. First, it outlines a theoretical rationale to expect a relationship between anti-nuclear activism (manifested as protest) and party positions on nuclear weapons (articulated in party platforms), as well as the conditions of that relationship. Second, the research design is described, including procedures for content analysis of party platforms and mass media coverage of anti-nuclear protest. Third, the

trends in party positions and protest are analyzed qualitatively and using graphical evidence. Fourth, regression analysis is deployed to test the hypothesized relationships formally. Fifth, the statistical results are discussed. Finally, the implications for anti-nuclear activism are considered.

This research demonstrates that it is plausible that there is a reciprocal relationship between party positions and anti-nuclear protest. The results are consistent with the conclusion that the Democratic Party responds to protests while protests respond to the Republican Party. The evolution of nuclear discourses away from arms control and toward proliferation may be associated with the decreased efficacy of anti-nuclear activism.

What Connects Activism and Party Positions?

Activism and protest are among the scattered social and political forces that political actors may monitor when taking stances on policy issues. As William Gamson (1975) emphasized, the permeability of the American political arena affords many outside groups an audience with decision makers. In this context, the strategy of social protest has diffused widely over time and across national borders such that it has become more readily accepted as legitimate, making it more likely that activist groups choose protest as one of their tactics (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). Recent technological advances have made protests easier to plan and stage while simultaneously undercutting the feasibility of building the kinds of organizations that effectively pressure political elites (Tufekci, 2017).

A key challenge for decision makers is to determine how the information provided by protests is relevant to their political goals. Ken Kollman (1998) explained that protests can transmit signals about what issues are (or are not) important to various constituencies. If political actors observe an anti-nuclear protest taking place, they may use this observation

to update their views about how pertinent the issue is to current politics. They may be keen to note the size of the protest, how it is discussed in the media, and its geographic diversity, as well as what type of people participate (or stay home). Are the protesters liberal, conservative, young, old, Black, or White? What aspects of the issue are the focus of the protests? Such information may be more politically actionable than public opinion polls, which often lack the granular detail that is valuable when taking issue stances (Herbst, 1998).

Kollman (1998) further argued that protests may serve to galvanize public opinion for a cause. Protests staged by the most interested and organized activists have the potential to demonstrate the viability of a cause to a broader community of activists who may then decide whether to join the bandwagon (Marwell & Oliver, 1993). Protests thus serve valuable informational functions to those making decisions in parties and activist communities.

While the direct effects of protest may be immediately palpable, there may also be longer term effects that derive from changing the lives of protest participants (Meyer, 2021). Involvement in activism may steer a person's life course by directing them toward or away from certain careers, presenting them with novel forms of political participation, or altering their social networks (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; McAdam, 1989). As a result, the downstream effects of protests may manifest years after the initial events took place and may feed back onto the broader political culture.

Activists may respond to changes that they observe in parties, just as parties may react to protests (Tarrow, 2021). The emergence of a new threat that is counter to the goals of a movement often corresponds with amplification in a wave of protest (Almeida, 2003; Goldstone & Tilly, 2001; Tilly, 1978). For example, if one or both of the parties

nominate especially hawkish candidates, groups may be unusually motivated to protest as a result. A presidential nominee such as Donald Trump, who has a record of dangerous positions on nuclear warfare (Frühling & O'Neil, 2017), could be an impetus to anti-nuclear activism along these lines. These effects may cross national boundaries because the stances of US political parties can have global implications. Aggressive US nuclear policy positions, for example, affect European nations where American missiles are housed.

The interaction of parties and protests is not likely to be automatic or unconditional. The nature of these processes requires interpretation and judgement on the part of leaders within both parties and movements. As a result, the emergence of a particular protest may be more informative to one party than to the other. Or, the positions of one party may be of greater consequence to anti-nuclear activists than the positions of the other party.

Given the possibility that different parties may diverge in their reactions to protest events, it is essential to understand the underlying variation in the nature of the Democratic and Republican parties. Matt Grossmann and David Hopkins (2016) have made a compelling case that there is considerable asymmetry between the parties on a wide range of dimensions (see also Freeman, 1986; Heaney, Masket, Miller, & Strolovitch, 2012). Most notably, the Democratic Party is relatively more open to outside groups, while the Republican Party is relatively more devoted to ideological purity. Conversely, a social movement may favor one party over another, even if it does not necessarily serve the activists' cause to do so. For example, the author's previous collaboration with Fabio Rojas demonstrated that the antiwar movement of the 2000s yielded ground to the Democratic Party even though the party had not acted decisively on the movement's core policy demands (Heaney & Rojas, 2015).

The ways that parties and protests interact may change over time as the nature of issues evolve. Issue evolution may be driven by a variety of factors, such as technological changes, pivotal events, and the ways that state actors have behaved relative to an issue. These developments may make an issue more or less urgent. Or, they may shift which party has more to gain from acting on it. Edward Carmines and James Stimson (1989) illustrated these dynamics with their analysis of race and civil rights issues in the United States. They showed how the Democratic and Republican parties adjusted their positions on race over time as the pro-civil rights stances became more electorally advantageous to Democrats and less beneficial to Republicans. While the issue of nuclear weapons is dissimilar to race in myriad ways, it is nonetheless possible that the nuclear issue has evolved analogously to alter the landscape on which parties and protests interact.

The way party leaders approach an issue may depend not only on the party's constituency, but also on whether the party is in power. When a party is in power, it has strong incentives to claim credit for recent developments, which may include preserving peace in difficult circumstances or securing treaties with foreign nations. Since the US Constitution designates the president as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, military confrontations naturally direct attention to the president and their party (Kriner, 2010). These considerations have the potential to alter the positions of a party depending on whether the current president is one of their own.

The factors reviewed in this section suggest several hypotheses about the relationship between party positions on nuclear weapons and anti-nuclear protests. First, protests are likely to be associated with movement toward anti-nuclear policy positions, while the absence of protest is likely to coincide with a drift in the direction of pro-nuclear positions (H_1). Second, protests are conversely expected to follow pro-nuclear shifts by the

parties and recede when parties move to oppose nuclear weapons (H_2). Third, the Democratic Party is anticipated to respond to anti-nuclear protests more readily than is the Republican Party (H_3). Fourth, the evolution of the nuclear issue toward expanded threats should prompt anti-nuclear responses by the party (H_4). Fifth, incumbent parties are prone to claim success in preventing nuclear conflict, which could weigh in favor of an anti-nuclear posture (H_5). These hypotheses are evaluated using the data collected in this project.

Research Design

This research draws data on party positions from the official party platforms of the Democratic and Republican parties. Party platforms are not a perfect measure of party positions. Yet the fact that a committee of prominent members of a party negotiates carefully over its provisions, a platform reflects a serious effort to summarize the views of the dominant faction of the party – or least compromises over those views. In this vein, platforms are a source of data commonly used by scholars of political parties (Janda, 2024), even if they do not always exhibit the anticipated causal effects (King and Laver, 1993).

Platform texts were accessed from *The American Presidency Project* (University of California Santa Barbara, 2023). Each party typically produces a distinct platform once every four years. One exception to this rule was in 2020 when the Republican Party re-adopted its 2016 platform verbatim, rather than negotiate a new platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. Platforms were examined for the 1944 to 2020 electoral cycles. The first year was selected as 1944 because that was one year prior to the use of atomic bombs in Japan during World War 2, thus providing a baseline for the subsequent years. The final year was 2020 because the 2024 platforms were not yet available as of this writing in June 2024. The

2016 Republican platform was also used as data for 2020 since repeating the platform was the explicit decision of the party.

Computer-assisted text analysis (Popping, 2000) enabled the selection of the paragraphs in the platforms most relevant to nuclear weapons. The texts were searched for the following terms: atom, nuclear, disarmament, control, intercontinental, ICBM, missile, weapons of mass destruction, and WMD. In each case where one of these terms was identified, the author read the paragraph in question to determine if it was relevant to nuclear weapons. The procedure meant that computer identification was a necessary but not sufficient condition for selection into the study. For example, a paragraph that addressed only the peaceful uses of nuclear power was not selected into the corpus of texts for further analysis, despite use of the word "nuclear." Every reference to nuclear weapons was retained in the corpus. A visual review by the author of all platforms suggested that the automated search identified all sections relevant to the study.

If nuclear weapons were referenced at least once in a paragraph, then the entire paragraph was retained in the corpus. Search of the Democratic Party platforms pinpointed paragraphs amounting to approximately 15,000 words, which is about 4 percent of the entirety of Democratic Party platforms over the period. Search of the Republican Party platforms detected paragraphs amounting to approximately 16,300 words, which is similarly about 4 percent of Republican Party platforms.

After compiling the entire corpus of texts, the author read each paragraph and coded it for references to nuclear weapons. The *a priori* categories were set as Pro-Nuclear, Anti-Nuclear, and Neutral. Upon reading the materials, subcategories were derived *a posteriori*, which are reported in Table 1. Each paragraph was coded into at least one subcategory, with multiple subcategories used if appropriate. Contradictory codes were

possible. For example, a single paragraph could be counted as both Pro-Nuclear Defense and Anti-Nuclear Defense. Such codings reflected the fact that the platforms encapsulated the multiple considerations of nuclear weapons policy, some of which were in tension with one another. While the majority of paragraphs were coded into only one category, some paragraphs were coded into a maximum (for both the Democratic and Republican platforms) of three categories. The maximum was set by observation rather than design; a paragraph could have been coded into four or five (or more) categories had that been the determination of the coder.

Table 1. Categories for Content Analysis of Party Platforms

Pro-Nuclear	Anti-Nuclear	Neutral
• Celebrate Nuclear Weapons • Pro-Nuclear Defense • Opponents Weak on Defense • Anti-Arms Control	• Celebrate Anti-Nuclear Achievement • Pro-Arms Control • Opponents Weak on Arms Control • Anti-Proliferation • Opponents Weak on Proliferation • Anti-Nuclear Defense	• Nuclear Risks High • Nuclear Proliferation is a Risk • Acknowledge Nuclear Weapons (used only if no other codes were relevant)

Source: Author's coding framework

Intercoder reliability (ICR) analysis is an essential part of content analysis for studies such as this one (Krippendorff, 2019). ICR ensures that the coding system is clear enough to be replicated confidently. It further guards against the possibility that a particular coder departs unreasonably from the coding plan. A research assistant was employed to generate a second set of codes to be used in ICR. This analysis yielded a Krippendorff's a of 0.909 for interval data using ReCal2 (Freelon, 2013), which reflects a generally acceptable level of intercoder agreement.

The second vital element of data required for this study is a measure of anti-nuclear protest activity. Given the length of the timeframe under consideration (1944-2020), newspapers are the only potential source of data that could cover the entire period. Contemporary studies are able to make use of online searches and crowdsourcing (Fisher et al., 2019; Heaney, 2020a), but these approaches are unreliable (if not entirely invalid) for events from the twentieth century. *The New York Times* is widely viewed as the nation's "newspaper of record," offering national media coverage with greater consistency than other sources (Martin & Hansen, 1998, p. 7). The selection of the *Times* keeps the focus of analysis on American-centered media, though this media does cover international events. In this respect, the study considers the effects of international events to the extent that they are filtered through the lens of American media.

While recognizing flaws inherent in newspaper data, major studies of social movements have turned to newspapers as the most accessible and reliable source of historical evidence. In their treatise on twentieth century social movements, Edwin Amenta and Neal Caren (2022; see also Heaney, 2020b) relied on four newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* (WP), the *Los Angeles Times* (LAT), and *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ).

The present study searched the *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* (ProQuest, 2023) database to determine the number of *New York Times* articles per year that referred to anti-nuclear protest. The specific search term was "("Anti-nuclear" or "Antinuclear" or "ban the bomb") and ("protest" or "demonstration" or "march")." The database was also searched for the use of the word "the" (i.e., a count of all articles) in order to create weights for the variation in the number of articles in the database each year. The reliability of this analysis was verified by estimating correlations with the results of the same search implemented in

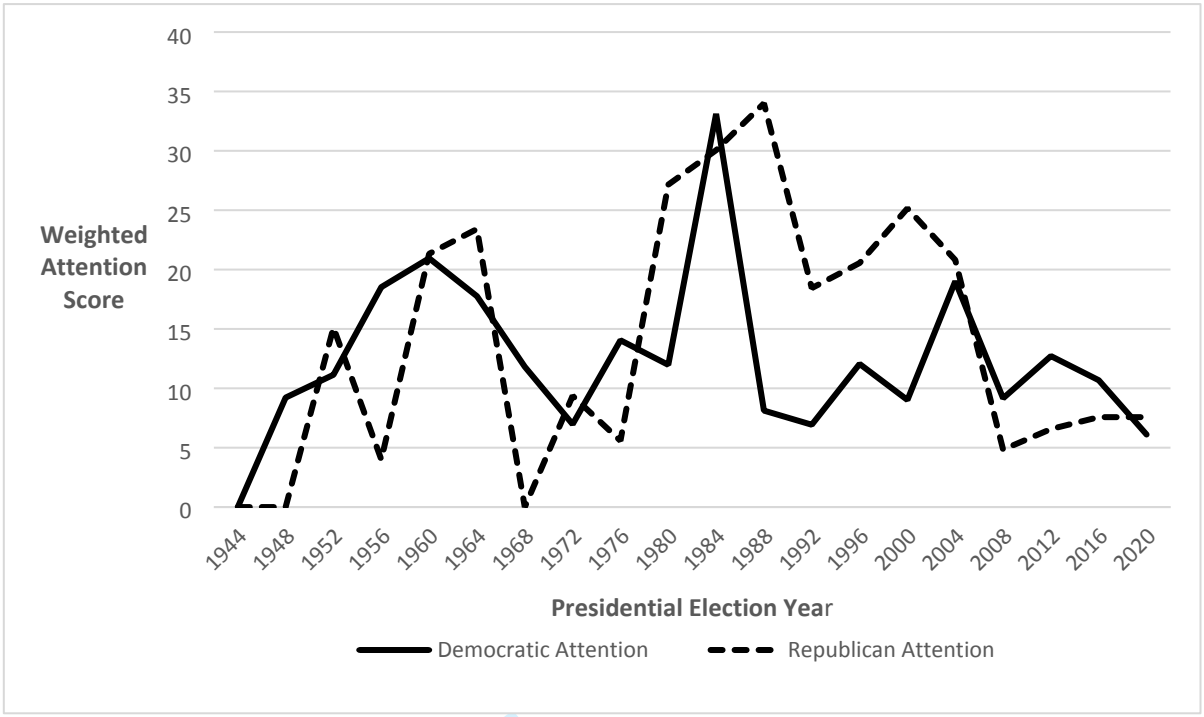
the WP (0.9459, $p \leq 0.05$, for the 1944 to 2008 period), the LAT (0.9528, $p \leq 0.05$, for the 1944 to 2020 period), and the WSJ (0.7758, $p \leq 0.05$, for the 1966 to 2020 period), all of which are indicative of high reliability.

The automated counting procedure was supplemented by reading all nuclear-relevant articles detected in the *New York Times* search to verify that they mentioned anti-nuclear protest. While the procedure detected some *false positives* (67 out of 1,396 articles), the correlation between the verified measure and the automatic count is extremely high, estimated at 0.9994 ($p \leq 0.05$) using annual measures from 1957 to 2020 period; the two measures are nearly identical. This result suggests that the automatic count yields a valid measure of media attention to nuclear protest.

Trends in Party Positions and Protests

The Democratic and Republican parties have fluctuated in how much platform space they have given to nuclear weapons. Figure 1 reports the total amount of attention given to nuclear weapons as indicated by the sum of all codes used on Table 1. These sums can be interpreted as a total number of considerations given to nuclear weapons. The sums in the table are weighted according to the length of the party's platform that year in words. Thus, in years when the party's platform was shorter, the sum was upweighted proportionately, and it was downweighted proportionately in years with longer platforms.

Figure 1. Attention to Nuclear Weapons by Party



Source: Author coding of party platforms from University of California Santa Barbara (2023).

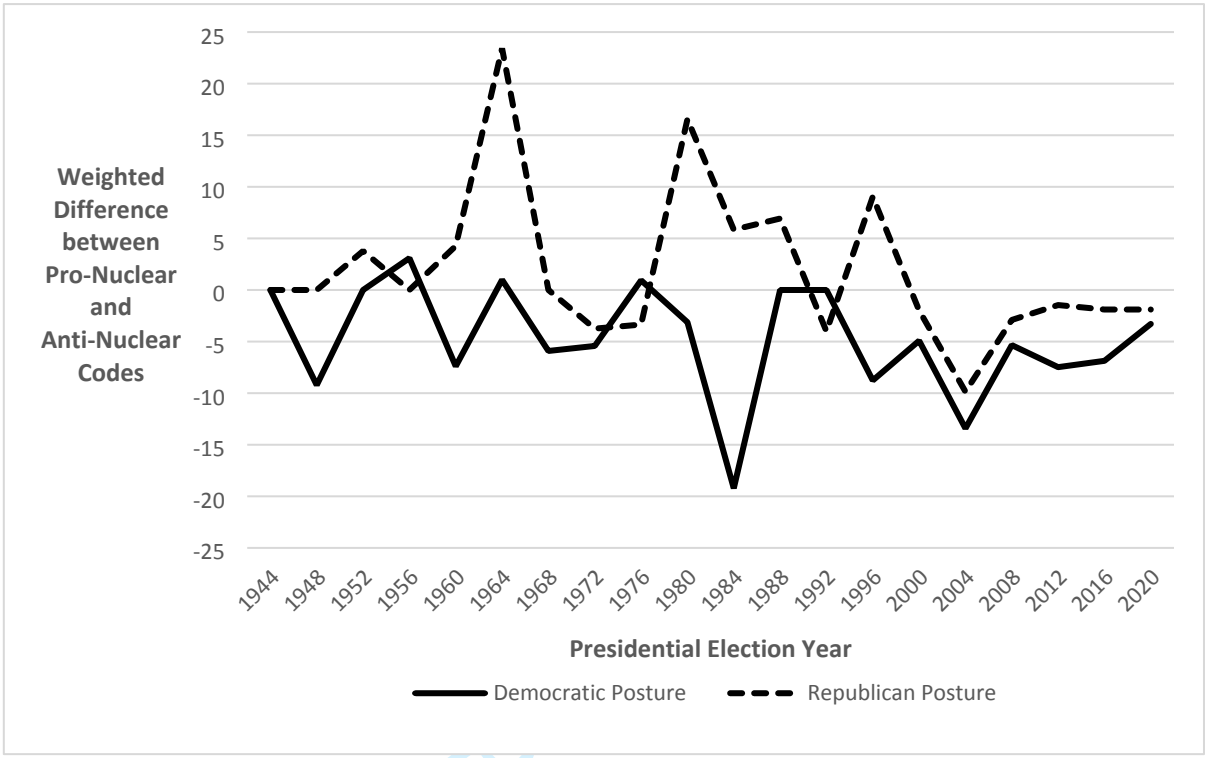
Figure 1 indicates zero attention to nuclear weapons in 1944, the year before they were invented. Immediately after their first use, Democrats referenced atomic weapons in their 1948 platform – as they were responsible for weapons development during the presidential administrations of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. By Dwight Eisenhower's 1952 presidential candidacy, Republicans had joined the debate on nuclear weapons, having been nonplussed by the Soviet Union's first test of a nuclear device in 1949. Party attention to nuclear weapons was at a relative peak in the early 1960s with the deepening of the Cold War and the surprise of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963. The parties' interest in nuclear weapons dropped again in the late 1960s and early 1970s, even though there was widening policy debate over anti-ballistic missiles at the time (Meyer, 1993, p. 459).

The Nuclear Freeze campaign occurred in tandem with a substantial jump in party platform discussions of nuclear weapons in the late 1970s and 1980s. The Republicans, in particular, devoted considerable energy to the nuclear issue in their 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1992 platforms. Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush used the issue to bolster their presidential candidacies and amplify the impression that they were strong on foreign affairs. The Democrats invested in the nuclear issue in 1984 with the presidential candidacy of Walter Mondale, as President Reagan appeared to be stoking confrontation with the Soviets. But having experienced overwhelming defeat in the 1984 election, Democrats appear to have ceded the issue to the Republicans for the remainder of the 1980s and 1990s.

The collapse of the Iron Curtain over Eastern Europe in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was widely considered the "end" of the Cold War. These events aligned with less attention to nuclear weapons, especially among Democrats. Concerns about proliferation and weapons of mass destruction – particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States – were reflected by an upturn in platform discussions of nuclear weapons. Both parties appear to have been relatively inattentive to the issue since 2004. The difference between the attention levels of the parties is not statistically significant, with $t = 0.56$, $p \leq 0.58$.

Differences between the parties are more apparent once their *positions* are taken into account; that is, not just how much attention they gave the issue, but the substance of what they said. The positions of the parties were determined by subtracting the number of Anti-Nuclear codes from the number of Pro-Nuclear codes. Neutral codes were not included in this calculation. The results are graphed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Posture on Nuclear Weapons by Party



Source: Author coding of party platforms from University of California Santa Barbara (2023).

The overall time series places the Republicans in a comparatively pro-nuclear posture and the Democrats in a comparatively anti-nuclear posture. The difference between the series is statistically significant, with $t = 3.20$, $p \leq 0.01$. There were a few years (1956, 1976, and 1992) in which the Democratic platform was slightly more pro-nuclear than the Republican platform, though the parties were relatively close in absolute terms.

The parties diverged in their nuclear postures substantially in 1964, 1980, 1984, and 1996. The Democrats took an effectively neutral nuclear posture in 1964 with the presidential candidacy of Lyndon Johnson. However, the Republicans articulated a historically hawkish position that year, along with the nomination of Barry Goldwater. This was the year in which Democrats launched the Daisy attack ad, implying that a Goldwater presidency would result in nuclear apocalypse (Jacobs, 2006; LBJ Library, 2012).

The Reagan candidacies in 1980 and 1984 matched with considerable partisan gaps. While the Democrats continued with a roughly neutral posture in 1980, the Republicans

pushed an aggressively pro-nuclear agenda, chastising Democratic incumbent Jimmy Carter as weak in this area. The Republicans moderated their (still pro-nuclear) stance somewhat in 1984, but the Democrats plunged sharply in the anti-nuclear direction, which was followed by Democratic nominee Walter Mondale's crushing defeat.

A gap between the parties opened up again in 1996 when the Republicans nominated Bob Dole for the presidency. His predecessor, George H. W. Bush, ran along with a neutral platform that claimed credit for ending the nuclear dangers associated with the Cold War. Since then, both Democrats and Republicans have sustained a more neutral/negative nuclear posture. Part of the reason for this trend is a shift in the nuclear discussion from arms control by the large nuclear powers to managing or preventing nuclear proliferation to other countries. Both parties are against proliferation, which is coded in the Anti-Nuclear category, thus yielding an anti-nuclear trend.

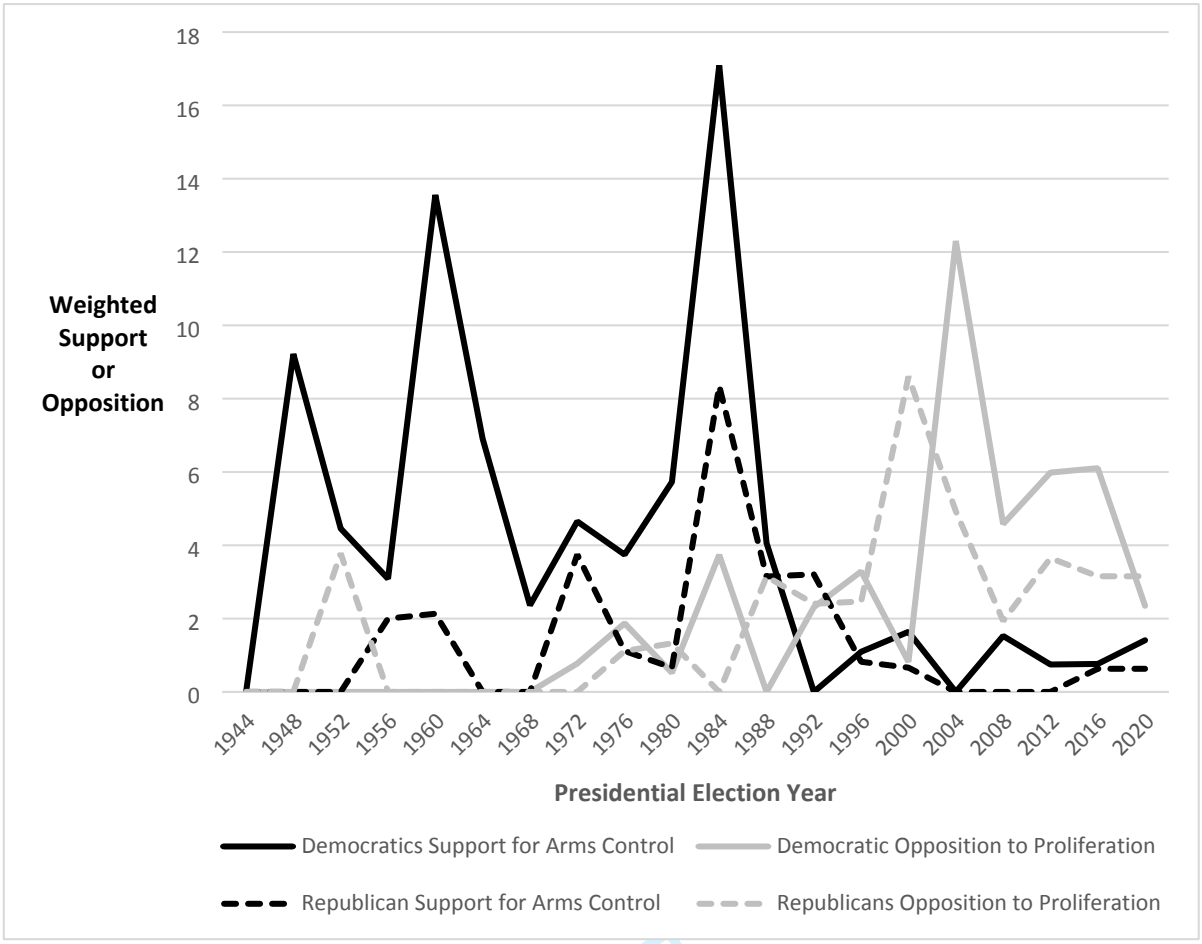
The data reported in Figure 2 reveal overall positive leanings for nuclear weapons in Republican platforms and overall negative leanings in Democratic platforms. This result derives from a tally of positive and negative statements. Yet an impression of difference between the parties is also gleaned subjectively by *reading* the platforms. Republican platforms consistently refer to nuclear weapons in the context of projecting national strength. For example, they sought to challenge "Communist Russia" in 1952 (University of California Santa Barbara, 2023: Republican Platform 1952, pp. 7-8), promised to "revitalize America's military research and development efforts" in 1980 (University of California Santa Barbara, 2023: Republican Platform 1980, p. 79), and committed to stop "rogue nations" in 2004 (University of California Santa Barbara, 2023: Republican Platform 2004, p. 31). In contrast, Democratic platforms consistently addressed nuclear weapons in terms of peace and international cooperation. For example, in 1952 the platform maintained that "[t]he

free world is rearming to secure peace" (University of California Santa Barbara, 2023: Democratic Platform 1952, p. 8), the 1980 platform proposed that "American support for arms control is important to our standing in the international community" (University of California, Santa Barbara 2023: Democratic Platform 1980, p. 101), and in 2004 it aspired to lead "international efforts" to stop proliferation (University of California Santa Barbara, 2023: Democratic Platform 2004, p. 8). This language did not necessarily materialize into policy differences, but it does reflect persistently varied attitudes among elites in the parties.

Variations in the platforms can be probed further by disaggregating the data to consider some of the sub-categories from which the summary measures are extracted, thus providing an indication of attention diversity (Boydstun, Bevan, and Thomas 2014). In particular, Figure 3 charts the positions of both parties on arms control and proliferation, and the general patterns and shifts after the end of the end of the Cold War. These issues are both in the Anti-Nuclear category, so Figure 3 considers only one side of the debate.

The black lines in Figure 3 represent support for arms control, while the gray lines indicate opposition to proliferation. Arms control here refers to international agreements in which the United States would limit its possession or use of nuclear arms in exchange for mutual guarantees by other countries. Proliferation refers to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by states or nonstate actors that do not already possess them, with efforts to stop it including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or enhancing international regulatory controls on fissile materials. Figure 3 reveals that Democrats persistently articulated support for arms control from 1948 to 1988.

Figure 3. Party Support for Arms Control and Opposition to Proliferation



Source: Author coding of party platforms from University of California Santa Barbara (2023).

Republicans also gave some credence to arms control from 1956 to 1992, with 1984 being their most vocal year on this point. However, neither party mentioned much support for arms control after 1992, allowing the issue to fall from the agenda.

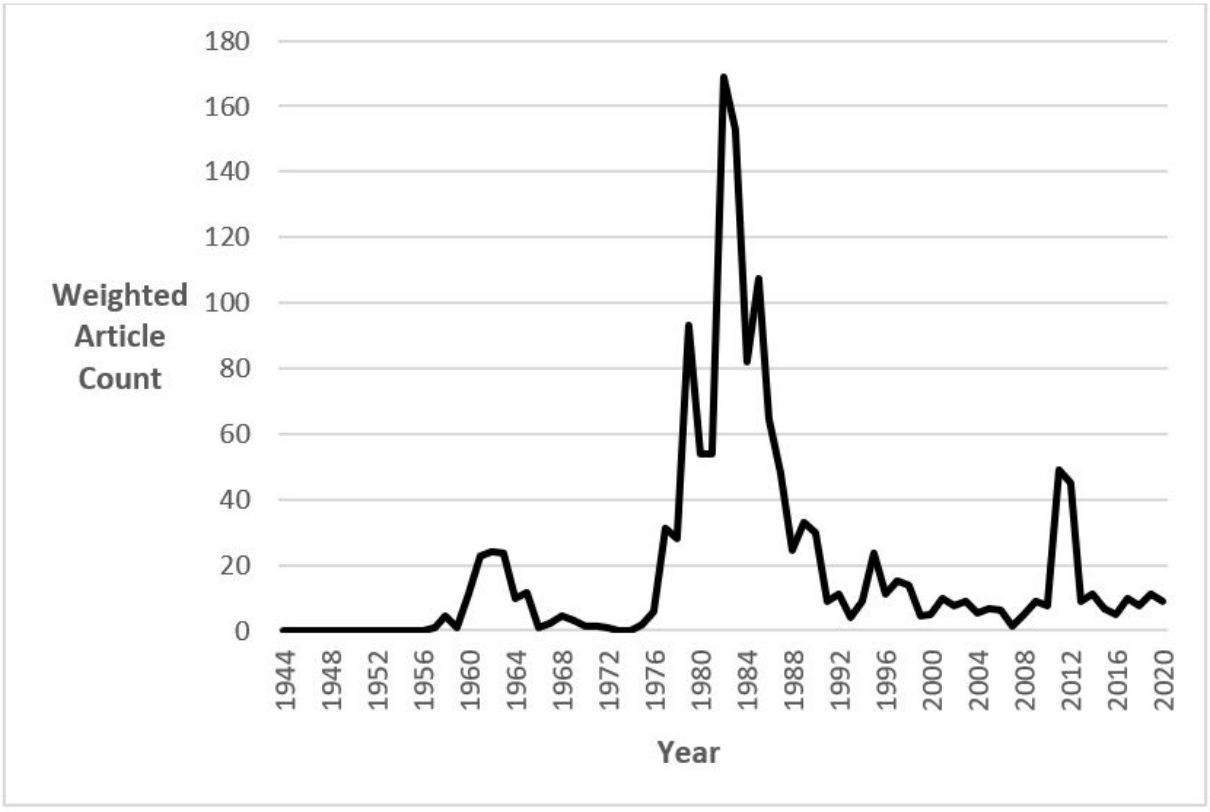
In contrast, proliferation was a relatively low-level concern for both parties until 1984, at which time it assumed somewhat elevated importance. By 1996, however, proliferation became the principal nuclear weapons issue. These days, when the parties mention nuclear weapons, they mostly concentrate on stopping proliferation.

Having considered the parties' positions, the analysis now turns to the prevalence of anti-nuclear protest. Figure 4 contains an annual measure of *New York Times* coverage of anti-nuclear protests. The count of articles on this topic per year is weighted based on the

total number of *Times* articles in the database for that year. The number of articles exposes not only the number of protests but also the broader significance of protests and activism, with some events and issues receiving more coverage than others. While the pattern in the articles counted in Figure 4 is not distorted by false positives, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of *false zeros*: anti-nuclear protest articles that were not counted; these are harder to detect systematically than are false positives. To the extent that these articles are missed, media attention to nuclear protest could possibly be underestimated.

Figure 4 suggests that there were approximately three comparatively significant periods of protest activity. First, 1958 to 1965 was the era of the "Ban the Bomb" protests. For example, Deborah Nagin and Gale Packer held a "Ban the Bomb" sit-in at an intersection in New York's Times Square on March 3, 1961; they were convicted of blocking traffic and given a sentence of three months probation (Benjamin, 1962). On a larger scale, thousands of demonstrators took part in Easter anti-nuclear protests in April 1962 in cities such as New York, Palm Beach, Philadelphia, and Chicago (Staff, 1962).

Figure 4. *New York Times* Articles on Anti-Nuclear Protest



Source: Author's searches using ProQuest (2023).

The largest spike in Figure 4 encompasses roughly the period 1977 to 1990, which was the era of the Nuclear Freeze campaign and broader concerns about the risks of nuclear power. The high point of this era was a rally held in New York City on June 12, 1982 when hundreds of thousands of people (or more) turned out to advocate nuclear disarmament (Montgomery, 1982). This event stirred a media storm (Boydstun, Hardy, & Walgrave, 2014). While massive demonstrations may have been the most memorable aspect of the Nuclear Freeze, it is advisable to also note that this was a sophisticated campaign with an extensive repertoire that was tied to party networks, Congress, and administration officials (Meyer, 1990).

The final notable spike in the pattern of protest coverage occurred in 2011 and 2012. The largest amount of coverage responded to protests inspired by the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan. Scattered other issues included stunts by anti-nuclear activists, such as a break-in at a nuclear weapons facility, that also drew media attention (Wald and Broad, 2012), while the 2011 Arab Spring protests connected with issues of nuclear proliferation, such as Libya's quest for nuclear weapons (Cowell, 2011). In 2019 and 2020, *all* of the *New York Times* articles mentioning anti-nuclear protest were *obituaries*, an ominous sign for the anti-nuclear movement.

Regression Analysis

Having reviewed the key evidence collected for this study, the question now arises as to whether the data support hypotheses H_1 to H_5 (discussed above). To address this question, the article reports three sets of regression models. The first set specifies party platform positions as a function of protest. The second set reverses the first specification to estimate protest as a function of party platforms. The third set more narrowly examines party positions on arms control and proliferation – rather than the entire nuclear discourse – as a function of protest.

In the first set of models, the dependent variable is party posture on nuclear weapons as is reported above in Figure 2. In Model 1.1, the independent variables are media attention to anti-nuclear protests in the previous year (t-1, the year before the election), whether the observed platform is for the Democratic Party or the Republican Party, a subjective/expert measure of the overall danger of nuclear weapons at a particular point in time (*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2024), and whether the platform is for the incumbent party or the challenging party. Model 1.2 contains the same variables as Model

1.1, though it also adds an interaction term between protests and party. These models can be estimated using Ordinary Least Squares with panel-corrected standard errors (Beck & Katz, 1995) to accommodate the presence of both time dependence (20 elections) and panel dependence (2 parties).

Estimates of Models 1.1 and 1.2 are reported in Table 2. In Model 1.1 the coefficient on the Democratic Party is negative and statistically significant. This result implies that Democratic Party platforms were more anti-nuclear in orientation than were Republican Party platforms, which matches the inference drawn above from Figure 2. The other

Table 2. Models of Party Postures on Nuclear Weapons

	Model 1.1	**Model 1.2**	**Descriptive Statistics**
	Coefficient (Standard Error)		Mean (Standard Deviation)
Independent Variable			
Protest coverage, t-1	0.013	0.091 *	21.863
	(0.029)	(0.036)	(38.272)
Democratic Party=1	--6.704 *	--3.285 *	0.500
	(1.774)	(1.370)	(0.506)
Party X *Protest*		--0.156 *	10.931
		(0.031)	(29.239)
Nuclear Danger	0.247	0.247	7.7175
	(0.274)	(0.274)	(4.042)
Incumbent Party=1	--2.570	--2.825 *	0.500
	(1.775)	(1.187)	(0.506)
Constant	1.162	--0.421	
	(2.786)	(2.658)	
N	40	40	
Groups	2	2	
Mean of Dep. Var.	--1.461	--1.461	
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	(7.368)	(7.368)	
R^2	0.263	0.428	
Wald χ^2	17.25 *	63.03 *	

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$. Estimator is Ordinary Least Squares with panel-corrected standard errors.

independent variables do not enter the model as statistically significant. Thus, the model does not indicate a direct association between protest, nuclear danger, or incumbency and platforms.

The results change substantially when a protest-party interaction term is introduced in Model 1.2, as required to test H_3 that the Democratic Party responds to protests more than the Republican Party. The coefficient on the Democratic Party remains negative and statistically significant. The hypothesized interaction is negative and statistically significant, as anticipated by H_3, demonstrating support for the expectation that protests are associated with more negative anti-nuclear stances when the platform is Democratic than when it is Republican. The direct association of protests and platforms becomes positive and significant in this model, as anticipated by H_1. Incumbency further enters this model as negative and statistically significant, as anticipated by H_5, implying that parties lean in the anti-nuclear direction when they hold the presidency. The coefficient on the subjective/expert estimate of the present danger of nuclear weapons remains insignificant, counter to H_4.

In the second set of models, the dependent variable is media coverage of protests in the year following the election (t+1). Model 2.1 is estimated with independent variables for the Democratic Party platform, the Republican Party platform, whether the incumbent president is a Republican, and the subjective/expert measure of nuclear danger. Model 2.2 includes the same variables as Model 2.1 while adding an interaction term between the party and protest. These models can be estimated using Ordinary Least Squares with Newey and West (1987) standard errors to account for time dependence. This regression does not have a panel dimension because there are not separate protest measures for the Democrats and Republicans, as there are for the platforms.

Estimates of Models 2.1 and 2.2 are reported in Table 3. Model 2.1 shows that a pro-nuclear Republican Party position is positively associated with protests in the following year, consistent with H_2, implying that protests received more attention in years after a more pro-nuclear Republican platform. The opposite is true with respect to the Democratic Party platforms. Pro-nuclear positions by Democrats are associated with lower levels of media attention to protest in the following year, contrary to H_2. Protest coverage is, in general, higher when there is a Republican incumbent. The subjective/expert measure of nuclear danger is not associated with attention to anti-nuclear protests.

Table 3. Models of Anti-Nuclear Protest Coverage

	Model 2.1	**Model 2.2**	**Descriptive Statistics**
	Coefficient (Standard Error)		Mean (Standard Deviation)
Independent Variable			
Republican posture	2.148 *	1.382 *	1.936
	(0.727)	(0.442)	(7.622)
Democratic posture	--2.477 *	--1.973 *	--4.768
	(1.063)	(0.747)	(5.446)
Party X *Posture*		--0.223 *	--2.344
		(0.073)	(46.782_
Republican Incumbent=1	22.942 *	22.229 *	0.500
	(8.423)	(7.272)	(0.513)
Nuclear Danger	--1.400	--1.309	7.175
	(0.875)	(7.272)	(4.095)
Constant	0.200	3.794	
	(7.175)	(7.442)	
N	19	19	
Groups	1	1	
Mean of Dep. Var.	17.211	17.211	
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	(26.067)	(26.067)	
F	3.27 *	6.00 *	
F degrees of freedom	4, 14	5, 13	

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$. Estimator is Ordinary Least Squares with Newey-West standard errors.

Model 2.2 has the same variables entered in Model 2.1, as well as an interaction term between the party and the anti-nuclear positions in their platforms. The coefficient on this interaction is negative and statistically significant, indicating that protests are less responsive to pro-nuclear stances by Democrats than by Republicans. This result is also inconsistent with H_2, which holds that protests take place due to pro-nuclear policy shifts.

In the third set of models, the dependent variables are party support for arms control and opposition to proliferation, as reported in Figure 3. Models 3.1 and 3.2 examine arms control, while Models 3.3 and 3.4 examine proliferation. The independent variable specifications of Models 3.1 and 3.3 are identical to Model 1.1, while the specifications of Models 3.2 and 3.4 are identical to Model 1.2. Ordinary Least Squares with panel-corrected standard errors is the statistical estimator.

The estimates of Models 3.1 through 3.4 are reported in Table 4. Model 3.1 reveals significant, positive associations between protest coverage, Democratic platforms, and support for arms control. Incumbency and nuclear risk are not significant. Model 3.2 yields the same results as Model 3.1 – thus supporting H_1 for arms control, but with no support for the presence of an interaction effect, counter to H_3. Hypotheses H_4 and H_5 are not supported by the estimates.

In contrast, Models 3.3 and 3.4 do not display significant coefficients for the parameters of any of the independent variables, counter to H_1, H_3, H_4, and H_5. Thus, the evidence does not signal a relationship between protest coverage and opposition to proliferation.

Table 4. Models of Party Support for Arms Control and Opposition to Proliferation

	Model 3.1	Model 3.2	Model 3.3	Model 3.4
	Arms Control Coefficient (Standard Error)		*Opposition to Proliferation* Coefficient (Standard Error)	
Independent Variable				
Protest coverage, t-1	0.049 *	0.033 *	--0.000	--0.007
	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Democratic Party=1	2.747 *	2.078 *	0.249	--0.048
	(0.811)	(0.888)	(0.634)	(0.721)
Party X *Protest*		0.031		0.014
		(0.020)		(0.017)
Nuclear Danger	--0.006	--0.006	--0.050	--0.500
	(0.131)	(0.131)	(0.124)	(0.125)
Incumbent Party=1	0.317	0.317	--0.875	--0.853
	(0.769)	(0.769)	(0.634)	(0.624)
Constant	0.510	0.510	2.788 *	2.924 *
	(1.138)	(1.138)	(1.149)	(1.144)
N	40	40	40	40
Groups	2	2	2	2
Mean of Dep. Var.	2.728	2.108		
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	(3.776)	(2.692)		
R^2	0.407	0.407	0.035	0.044
Wald χ^2	30.39 *	30.39 *	2.20	3.02

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$. Estimator is Ordinary Least Squares with panel-corrected standard errors.

What do the Regression Results Mean?

The statistical results are best received as evidence of association (or lack thereof) between the variables under analysis, rather than as causal effects. The most substantial reason for caution is the presence of reciprocal effects between protest coverage and platform positions. The endogeneity of these factors is not fully accounted for in the single-equation models presented here. Thus, it is not clear how much pressure is flowing from protest to parties and how much goes in the reverse direction. The wisest view is to recognize that there appears to be an association between these factors. The ultimate cause of the

observations may come from one direction or the other, from both directions, or from other considerations that are not modeled.

Proceeding with all appropriate caution, there are still lessons to be drawn from these results. First, the evidence signals that there is not a direct association from past protest coverage to future party platforms (H_1), corresponding with the insignificant coefficient on protest coverage in Model 1.1. Rather, any association that may exist appears to be mediated through the parties (H_3), as the party coefficient becomes significant only when the interaction term is included in Model 1.2. It is plausible (though not conclusive) that Democratic Party platforms become more anti-nuclear during times of extensive protest, following the significant interaction effect in Model 1.2 (expected in H_3). It is unlikely that the Republican Party moderates its platform to be more anti-nuclear because of protests. If anything, it is plausible (but definitely not conclusive) that Republicans are emboldened to lean in a more pro-nuclear direction when anti-nuclear protests are in the news.

Second, the results are consistent with the idea that protests are determined to challenge Republicans in general, and pro-nuclear Republican platforms in particular, as Model 2.2 has significant coefficients on both Republican posture and the party-posture interaction. In fact, there are indications that protests may be *less* critically responsive to Democrats. This inference follows from the fact that more pro-nuclear Democratic platforms are associated with lower levels of protest coverage in the following year. Even when Democrats become more pro-nuclear, they are not punished with anti-nuclear protests. Of course, Democrats are comparatively anti-nuclear when juxtaposed to Republicans. Thus, protesters may view Democrats as their allies in a broad sense without worrying about every platform point. Indeed, the significance of the interaction effect in

Model 2.2 coexists with the possibility that protests react *jointly* rather than independently to the platforms.

Third, the shift of nuclear discourse to proliferation has not been to the advantage of the anti-nuclear movement. While there is an association between arms control and protest coverage (given positive coefficients in Models 3.1 and 3.2), there is no such association with attention to proliferation (given insignificant coefficients in Models 3.3 and 3.4). Reiterating the above concerns, it would be premature to infer that proliferation discourses are causally associated with declining protests. But it is still true that proliferation discourses are *not* strongly associated with a *growing* anti-nuclear movement.

Fourth, there could be multiple reasons for the lack of association between the subjective/expert measure of nuclear danger and party postures (as conjectured in H_4). One possibility is that the measure of danger is simply not very good. It is produced by an advocacy group with an incentive to motivate mobilization. A second possibility is that political actors are not highly sensitive to variations in perceived nuclear dangers. Because nuclear weapons have not been used against an enemy since 1945, the chances that they are to be used again may be perceived as too remote to weigh systematically. A third possibility is that since the timing of changes in nuclear dangers does not occur on a timeframe aligned with the electoral cycle, any causal effects may evaporate before the party writes its platform. For example, the Cold War ended early in George H. W. Bush's term as president, which was an enormous reduction in nuclear risk. By the time he was up for reelection, economic recession was a more salient issue, likely reducing Republicans' incentives to talk about nuclear weapons. Finally, it is possible that there is no linear effect flowing from nuclear danger to party posture, which may be result of politicians and the

public having very different assessments of risk than are held by experts (Sjöberg & Drottz-Sjöberg, 2008).

Lessons for Anti-Nuclear Advocacy

A primary goal of this research is to draw lessons for anti-nuclear advocacy based on the histories of policy and advocacy. Such lessons are inherently limited by the uncertainties of a changing political future. The Cold War is over, but a new era of superpower competition has been launched. This concluding section considers potential implications regarding issues and party relations.

Arms Control versus Proliferation

A clear lesson from this research is that the anti-nuclear movement was mobilizing to a greater extent when the nuclear discourse was focused on arms control than after it shifted to proliferation. Hence, it would be valuable to consider further the reasons behind this difference. There are three general types of explanations. The first is historical coincidence. The anti-nuclear movement just happened to hit its apex when the debate was about arms control. The second is the nature of the issue. There is something about arms control that makes it more amenable to mobilization than is the case for proliferation. The third is the strategies of the movement. The movement's approach to arms control was comparatively smart and effective. Chances are that there is some element of truth in each of these possibilities.

Arms control as an issue had some desirable features from a mobilization perspective that may not be as present in proliferation. One, arms control debates were largely about creating mutually agreed limitations between the United States and the Soviet

Union. In this situation, a typical citizen can apply a rational-actor perspective, imagining that the leaders of two countries are able to meet one-on-one to hammer out an agreement. These leaders may be envisioned to be potentially responsive to pressure. Two, war between the United States and the Soviet Union was prospectively a total war that could have involved an end to the habitability of the Earth, thus motivating citizens' engagement. Three, the "nuclear freeze" was a relatively straightforward idea that held the promise of success and effectiveness. Four, clear partisan cues were present, with Democrats more-or-less supporting arms control and Republicans expressing greater skepticism. These elements were drawn together by skillful activist leaders to energize a movement.

Proliferation, on the other hand, offers a less clear case for mobilization. One, opposition to proliferation seeks to prevent non-nuclear nations from acquiring weapons; it is more about coercion than mutual agreement (though carrots can also be introduced, in addition to sticks). Two, the pivotal decision makers in such a situation are, thus, necessarily the potential proliferators. Movements may perceive these nations as less susceptible to pressure through protest. Three, proliferation presents a less obvious case for the total destruction of life on Earth than a war between the superpowers. A nuclear attack by North Korea would be very unfortunate, but probably not the end of it all. Four, there is not a clear, easy-to-understand proposal for how to deal with this problem. What agreement could possibly prevent every rogue nation and terrorist group from seizing a nuclear weapon if it was within its reach? Five, the Democratic and Republican parties have converged on opposing proliferation at a time when the parties are otherwise divided on innumerable other issues. These elements do not readily line up into a viable case for mobilization.

What would be the best direction for the anti-nuclear movement in light of these considerations? A first approach would be to try to revive arms control as a salient issue. A case could be made that current stockpiles of nuclear weapons are still dangerously large. The war between Ukraine and Russia, as well conflict between Russian and the West more broadly, make this risk seem all too salient. If the wrong people gained power in the United States or Russia, total nuclear war could be launched.

A second approach would be to aim for significant reframing of proliferation as an issue. The development of a clever proposal for how to prevent proliferation could generate greater interest among grassroots activists. Even though Democrats and Republicans both oppose proliferation, a case could be made that the Republican approach is too hawkish and, thus, too dangerous. A successful campaign would require raising the perceived risks of proliferation while presenting a convincing policy solution. This strategy might not require a large shift in public opinion and, therefore, could possibly be achieved with modest resource investments by activists.

Any actual anti-nuclear campaign need not necessarily choose between arms control and proliferation, instead adopting a mixed approach. Nevertheless, the research in this project recommends cognizance of differences between these issues and how they have historically corresponded with anti-nuclear mobilizations.

Managing Party Relations with Republicans

The Republican Party has not historically been a friend of the anti-nuclear movement. At times, it has resorted to an aggressive pro-nuclear posture to advance its electoral and policy goals. It has shown little, if any, sympathy for anti-nuclear protests. Anti-nuclear protests may possibly even embolden a hawkish pro-nuclear posture by Republicans.

Advocates may be inclined to note the Republican record and choose not to engage with the party. The 2024 nomination of Donald Trump as the party's standard bearer does not inspire confidence that the party is inclined to undertake a mission of peace. But the stakes are too high to walk away from the Republican Party, as it is one of the two major parties in the United States. America cannot be governed without the Republicans. Therefore, investment in transforming the Republican Party's stance on nuclear weapons may be crucial for peace.

The evidence at hand suggests that Republicans are not likely to change in desired ways as a result of anti-nuclear protests. The party is generally not amenable to this kind of pressure. But it is receptive to *ideological* arguments. If pro-market-oriented anti-nuclear think tanks, for example, could gain a foothold in Republican circles, they could conceivably be an impetus for an anti-nuclear shift. If the argument could be advanced that nuclear weapons are not good for business and the economy, it is possible that some Republicans would listen. In any case, it is not wise to neglect the Republican Party entirely when the Democrats are not completely reliable, as is considered next.

Managing Party Relations with Democrats

If the anti-nuclear movement has an ally between the two major parties, it is the Democrats. Democratic Party platforms have consistently advanced neutral-to-anti-nuclear positions (after having been responsible for the only use of nuclear weapons against civilians in world history). The Democrats appear to have responded sympathetically to anti-nuclear protests in the past. Indeed, the 1984 Democratic Party platform was the most unabashedly anti-nuclear platform ever approved by a major party. Nevertheless, it may not be possible to trust Democrats to be robust nuclear opponents. Democrats may not be

as strongly opposed to nuclear weapons as they could be, simply because they are perceived as being better on the issue than the Republicans. Anti-nuclear advocates tend to look the other way even when Democrats vocalize pro-nuclear stances.

As a political party, the Democratic Party's first order of business is winning elections. If opposing nuclear weapons is electorally advantageous, then Democrats may espouse these views in election campaigns. But, in the event that they win the presidency, any Democratic president is likely to wield military power (including threats of nuclear strikes) in a manner most likely to augment their power and continued electability. What is most advisable for nuclear opponents in these circumstances?

First, Democrats appear to be receptive to anti-nuclear protests. Thus, staging such protests is likely to lead to entré within the party. Anti-nuclear activists can find a comfortable position inside the party. They are viable candidates for important elected offices, possibility as high as the presidency itself. Persistence in protest does not seem to hurt acceptance among Democrats.

Second, receptiveness should not be confused with reliability or serve as a basis of trust. The Democrats are a party of groups. Peace activists are welcome – but so are many other groups. One day, the party may fight for peace, but the next day it may turn to immigration or health care as a more pressing cause, as it did once Barack Obama ascended to the presidency (Heaney & Rojas, 2015). To be influential within the party requires protesting when Democrats are out of power *and* when they are in power. Only a constant flow of these pressures is likely to keep the Democrats on board with a peace agenda.

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