

Emerging Technology + International Security

17.449

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Information Disclosure

Information:
facts about something or someone

Information and Security

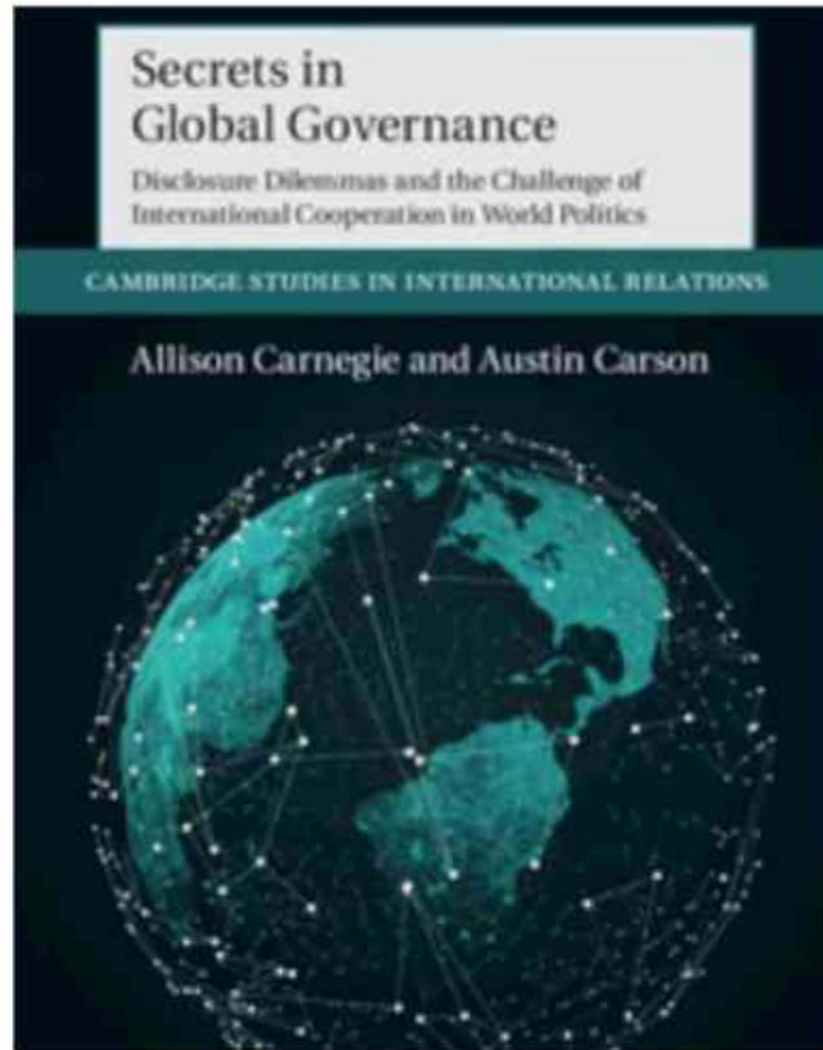
- Information
 - Shapes when conflicts begin and end
 - Can deter conflict
 - Can shape targeting/conduct of conflict
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)
 - Change information flow/transmission speed
 - Shifts information asymmetries
- Affects interstate and intrastate conflicts

Fearon's Rationalist Explanations for War

- Private information and incentives to misrepresent
- "Wars usually begin when two [actors] disagree on their relative strength (Blainey 1981)."
 - Blainey suggests: emotional commitments might bias assessments; complexity makes it hard to make estimates (heuristics); states have private information



**Why might a state decide to (or not to)
disclose sensitive information?**



Carnegie, Allison, and Austin Carson. *Secrets in Global Governance: Disclosure Dilemmas and the Challenge of International Cooperation in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. © Cambridge University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Disclose: Yes

- Name and shame a rival
- Deterrence
 - Coercive disclosure
 - Demonstrate the “power to hurt”
- Build support for state
 - Drive international action



Image courtesy of [the U.S. Government](#). Source: Wikimedia Commons. This image is in the public domain.

Disclose: **No**

- Reveal sources + methods
- Publicizes “rates of non-compliance”
 - May lead to more disclosures
- “Sharpens threats to others”
 - Could trigger arms racing
 - Hide: Israel’s nuclear weapons status
 - Disclose: Brazil’s nuclear weapons program



Image courtesy of [the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency](#). Source: Wikimedia Commons. This image is in the public domain.



Image by [American reconnaissance satellite KH-4 CORONA](#). Source: Wikimedia Commons. This image is in the public domain.

Delegating the disclosure decision.

Delegating the Disclosure Decision

- New ICTs take decision out of governments' hands
- Governments can try to control disclosure
 - Initial "public-use" satellites were gov'n't run: Landsat
 - Laws: Kyl-Bingaman Amendment (until July 2020)
 - Purchase exclusive rights
 - Becomes challenging as number of providers grows
- Who discloses?
 - NGOs, companies, media
 - Amplified via social media, increasing connectivity

Proliferation of Commercial Satellite Firms

- Dozens of firms worldwide
- Hundreds of satellites
 - Lower launch costs
 - New communication infrastructure
 - Rapid global coverage



Image courtesy of [the U.S. Air Force](#). Source: Wikimedia Commons. This image is in the public domain.

- Planet Labs
 - 200+ satellites
 - 3 hr delivery time

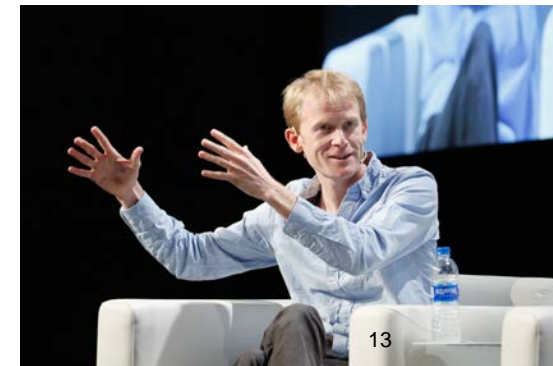
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Proliferation of Commercial Satellite Firms

- Increasing quality
 - Higher resolution
 - More frequent revisit rates
 - More rapid processing/dissemination
- Wider range of products
 - Electro-optical
 - Infrared
 - Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)

Proliferation of Commercial Satellite Firms



Richards, Sam. "Exclusive: State Patrol Spy Plane Over Protest (Video)." Unicorn Riot. February 10, 2021. License CC BY-NC-SA.

So why does this matter?

Information Cues: Overview

- Public seen as uniformed, particularly on foreign policy
- Public uses “cues” to make decisions
 - “Top down” cues connote legitimacy, correct action
 - IGOs/NGOs
 - Elected officials
 - In the US, senior military officers (including on non-security issues)
- Cue quality
 - Trust
 - Competence/Capability
 - Political independence

Information Cues: Two Typologies

- Verification: Verify government claims
 - Confirmed September 2019 Saudi oil facility attack
 - Contradicted President Trump's NK claims
- Revelation: Divulge information not previously acknowledged
 - Incentives to misrepresent/hide information
 - Revealed human rights violations in Xinjiang, Burundi, Sudan, etc
 - ID'd secret bases in Africa
- Greater influence than traditional leaks
 - "Picture is worth a thousand words"



Donald J. Trump ✓

@realDonaldTrump

Following



Just landed - a long trip, but everybody can now feel much safer than the day I took office. There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea. Meeting with Kim Jong Un was an interesting and very positive experience. North Korea has great potential for the future!

10:56 AM - 13 Jun 2018

3,943 Retweets **15,640** Likes



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Information Cues: Political Consequences?

- Public support:
 - For leader
 - Foreign policies
 - Demands for more hawkish actions
- Jeopardizes:
 - Covert operations
 - Escalation control

Research Question

How do emerging technologies that erode government control over information affect public support for leaders and their foreign policies?

The Argument

- Disclosure of information by commercial firms can be just as influential as information supplied by government agencies

Hypotheses (Verification) [Confirmation]

When commercial satellite firms and similar non-state actors release information that *confirms* the statements of government leaders, the public will be...

Leader Accuracy (H_{1A})

- 1) **more likely** to perceive these statements as accurate; and
- 2) **more likely** to support these leaders and the statements they make in the future.

Support for Policy (H_{1B})

more likely to support policies these leaders propose to address national security crises.

Hypotheses (Verification) [Contradiction]

When commercial satellite firms and similar non-state actors release information that *contradicts* the statements of government leaders, the public will be...

Leader Accuracy (H_{2A})

- 1) **less likely** to perceive these statements as accurate; and
- 2) **less likely** to support these leaders and the statements they make in the future.

Support for Policy (H_{2B})

less likely to support policies these leaders propose to address national security crises.

Hypotheses (Revelation)

Revelation (H_3): Revelation of previously unacknowledged information by commercial satellite firms and similar non-state actors will generate greater support for more assertive policies.

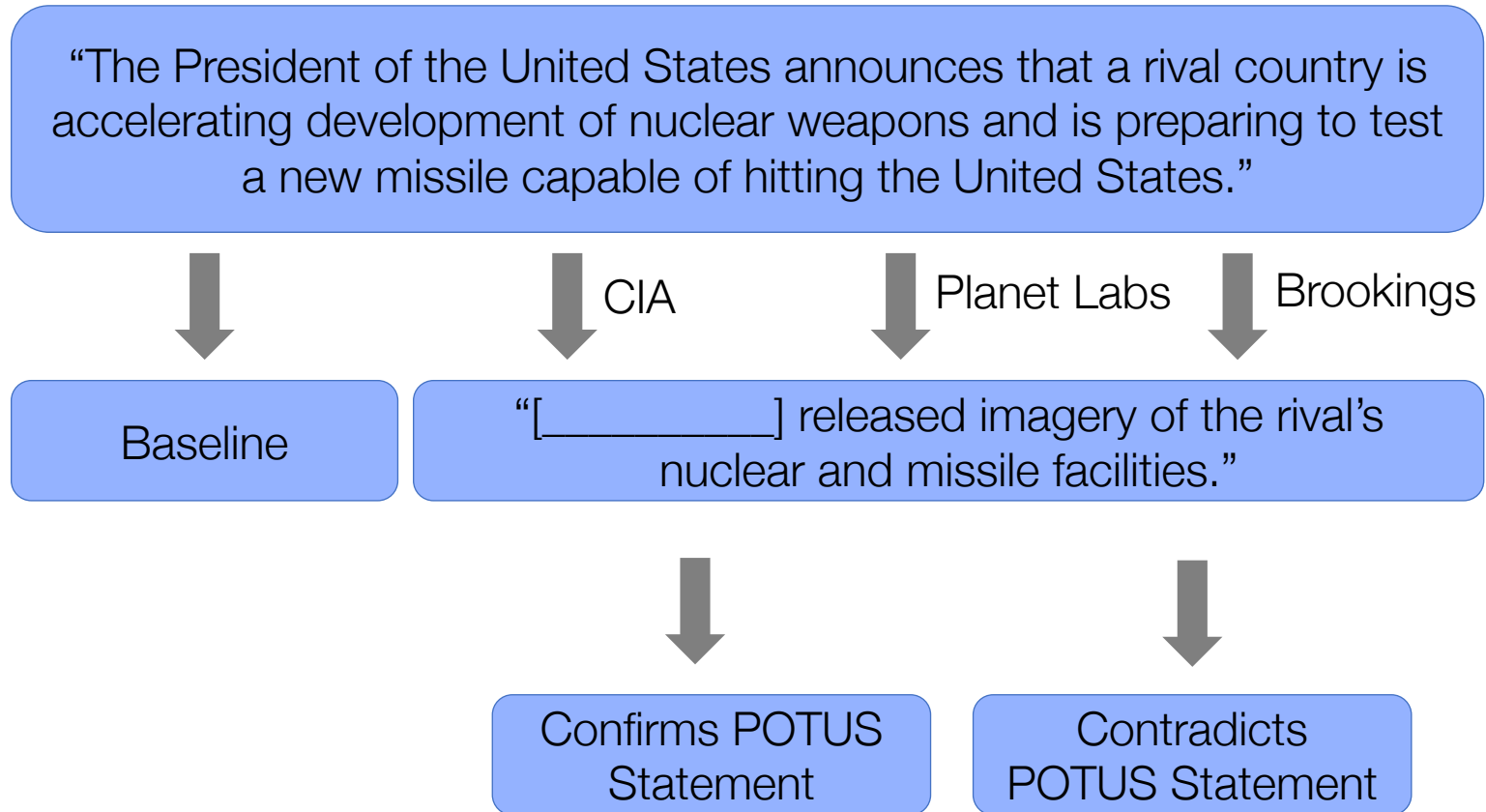
Hypotheses (Source Perception)

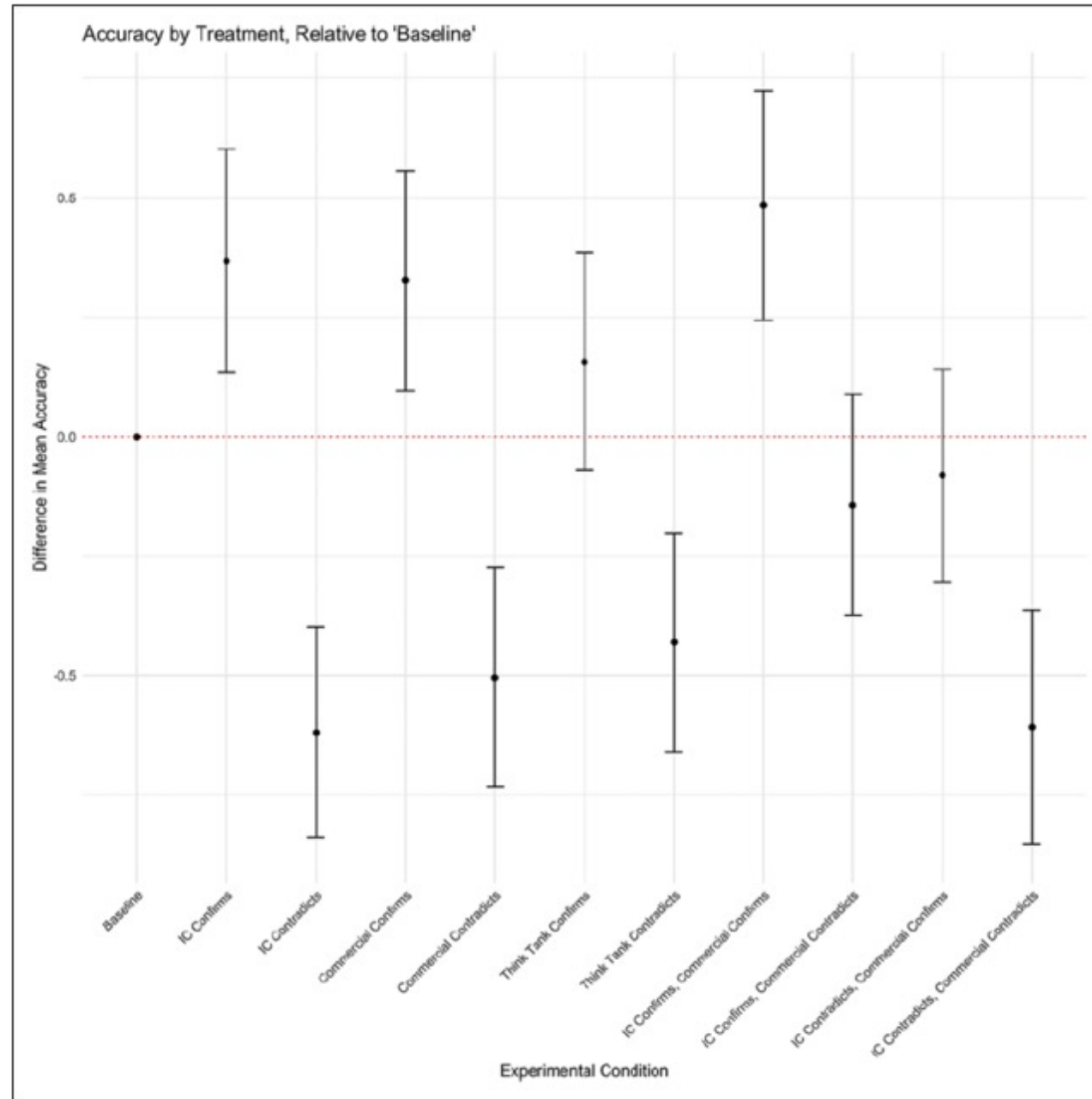
Source Perception (H_4): In all cases, information disclosed by commercial satellite firms and similar non-state actors will move public opinion at least as much as the same information disclosed by government agencies.

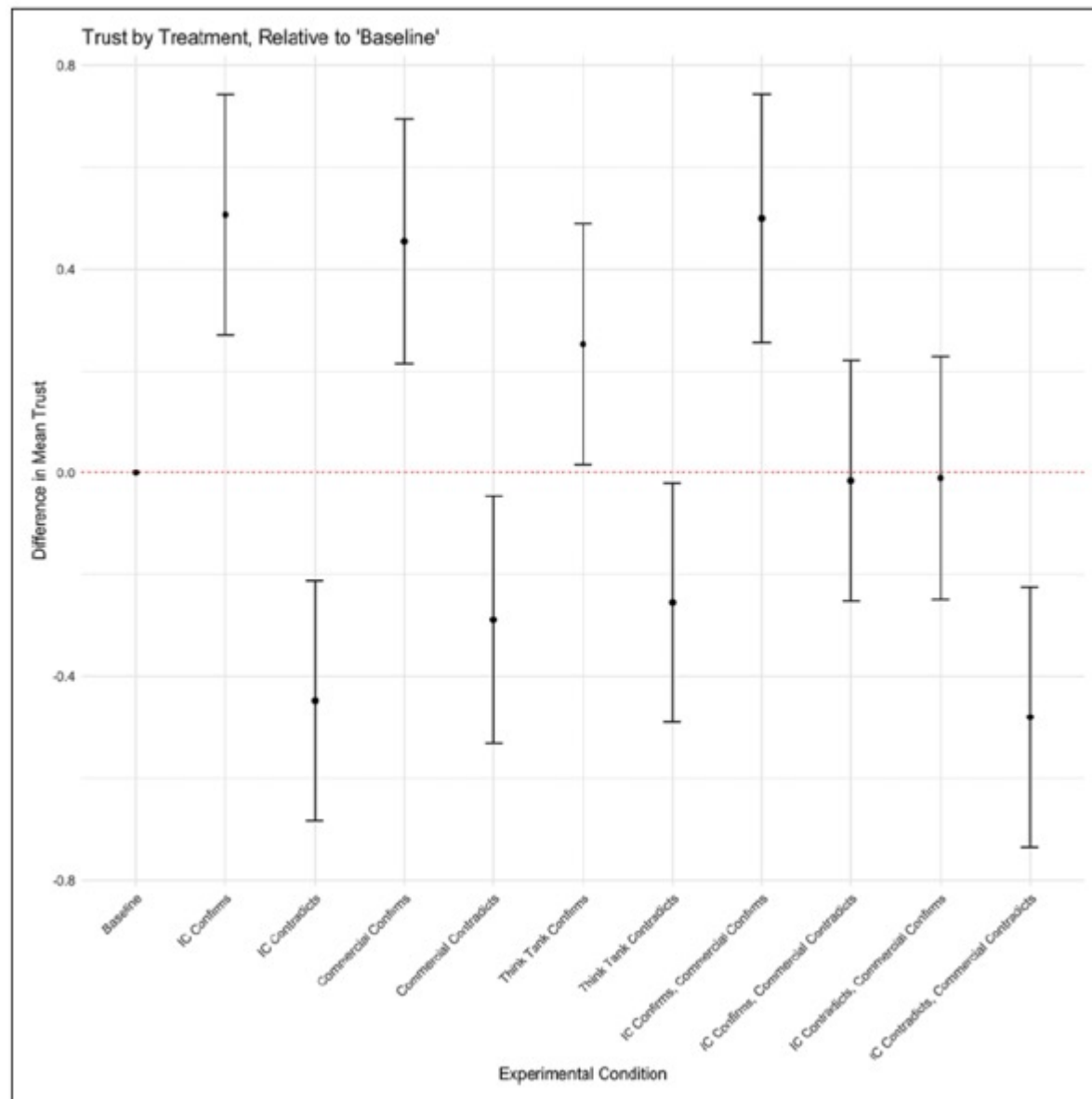
Methodology: Survey Experiments

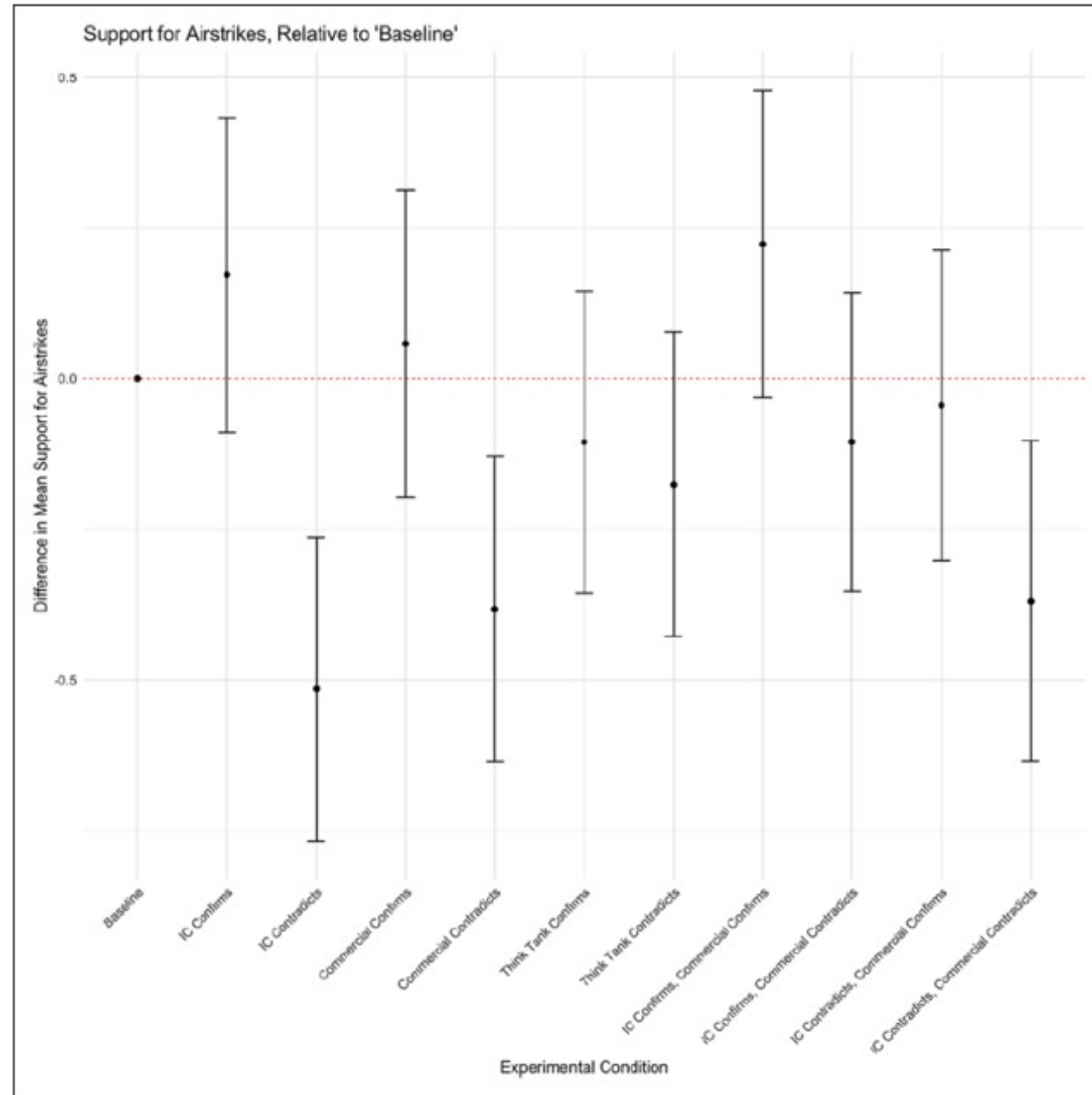
- Examine effects of verification and revelation
 - Two experiments embedded in surveys
 - Overcomes fundamental problem of causal inference
- Fielded on Lucid U.S. Sample in January 2020
 - N=2,067
 - Underrepresents Hispanics and \$75K+ income
 - Overrepresents veterans
- Exposes respondents to crisis vignette; varies info source

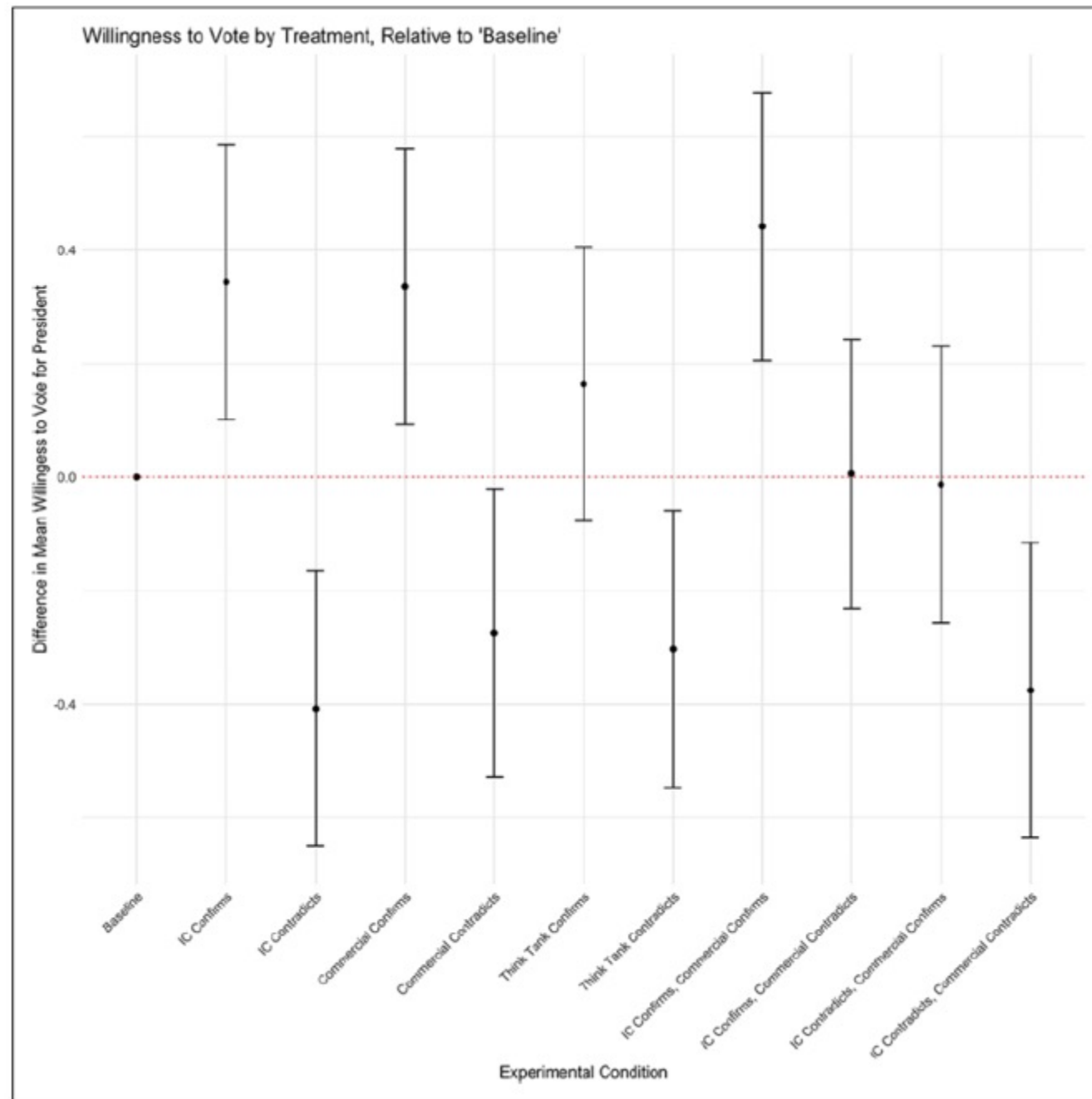
Research Design: Verification Experiment











Findings: Source Perception Ratings

	<i>Capability</i>	<i>Politicization</i>
U.S. Gov't Intelligence	3.77 (.027)	3.16 (.026)
Think Tank	3.31 (.048)	2.85 (.024)
Commercial Firm	3.29 (.049)	2.89 (.025)

Note: Measures for “politicization” and “truth-telling” are based on a four-point scale, while measures for “capability” are measured on a five-point scale. Higher numbers indicate higher levels of the ascribed source characteristic. Values outlined in blue reflect entities scoring highest on each characteristic, while values outlined in red reflect entities scoring lowest on each characteristic.

Recap

- New technologies = New cue sources
- Affects public support:
 - For leader
 - Foreign policies
 - Demands for more hawkish actions
- Jeopardizes:
 - Covert operations
 - Escalation control



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