

Project: *Confronting the Crazy Dictator: Political Ideology, Worldviews, and Support for Preemptive Measures Against Foreign Leaders.*

Note: Please post the following abstract on the A-State Research webpage in lieu of the entire final report.

Abstract: World leaders often make threats that, if carried out, would clearly run counter to their own interests. Such threats elicit a variety of responses with varying levels of support from the target country's general population. But what determines that level of support? We argue that conservatives – having a stronger desire to reduce uncertainty – should be more likely to support preemptive measures against foreign leaders who make irrational threats, which increase uncertainty regarding their behavior. Similarly, individuals with strong dangerous world beliefs – being more susceptible to information suggesting that the world is dangerous – should be more likely to view foreign leaders as irrational after hearing an irrational threat, but less likely to attenuate their perceptions of irrationality after hearing a more rational follow-up threat. A grant from the Faculty Research Awards Committee (FRAC) allowed us to conduct a two-stage experiment involving threats and follow-up threats of varying rationality. The experiment provided moderate to strong support for the hypotheses.

Report: Using the money from the FRAC grant, my co-author and I conducted an experiment in which we exposed subjects to repeated threats of varying levels of rationality from foreign leaders and then measured subjects' support for preemptive measures against those leaders. The experiment was conducted online using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which is used by private individuals on their home computers to complete tasks that are posted on MTurk by "requesters." Not only is the data reliable (MTurk has been used to replicate several classic experiments in political science), but fast and cheap. Using the \$330 from the FRAC grant, we collected 600 survey responses (\$0.50 per response plus 10% fee to Amazon) in less than three days.

Before sending the paper out for review, my co-author and I are planning to replicate the experiment using a sample comprised of college students as a way of testing the robustness of the results. We should be able to conduct the replication once fall semester begins and incorporate the results into the paper within a few weeks, hopefully sending the paper out for review before October. We are hopeful that this paper could get published in a very high quality journal. The theoretical argument is solid and North Korea and its eccentric leader have been in the news a lot lately, giving the paper a built-in advantage during the review process simply because of the entertainment value.

Although much depends on the results of the replication, my co-author and I are hopeful enough that we are planning on submitting this paper to either *The Journal of Politics* (one of the top general political science journals) or *International Organizations* (the top international relations journal). We believe that this paper has implications for many areas

of political science research, particularly in international relations, including foreign policy attitude formation, political psychology and behavior, public opinion, deterrence theory, foreign policy decision-making, even political campaigning.

This project has the potential to grow into a new research agenda. Given that individuals respond differently to unpredictability depending on their political ideology, there should be variance in the extent to which leaders publicly accuse other leaders of being irrational based on their own political ideology, approval ratings, background, etc. Similarly, I want to examine the circumstances under which irrational threats – a la Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis – are more successful. The argument in this paper suggests that making irrational threats may be more likely to succeed depending on the domestic political situation within the opposing country (the leader’s approval ratings, the population’s political ideology, etc.). Variance in the extent to which acting erratically is employed as a political tactic, as well as the extent to which acting erratically is successful, could be examined using a framework based on the domestic political situation within the opposing country.