

# We Don't Do That: National Identity and Nuclear Non-Use

Wyatt King

December 16, 2025

## Research Question

My thesis is concerned with the question of what factors impact public support for the use of nuclear weapons. More narrowly, I intend to evaluate two subsidiary questions: How do arguments about national identity affect support for nuclear weapons use, and how does knowledge of the institutionalization of non-use affect support for nuclear use? These questions build on existing research into the nuclear taboo, as will be discussed in the ensuing sections.

## Theory

To understand what factors impact public support for nuclear weapons use, I intend to return to two of the mechanisms that Tannewald (2007) posits strengthen the nuclear taboo. The first is norms' constitutive effects on states' identity, and the second is the institutionalization of nuclear non-use.

In her book the *Nuclear Taboo*, Nina Tannenwald distinguishes between norms' regulative and constitutive effects on state behavior. Norms' regulative effects refer to how norms "constrain exogenously given self interest and behavior, or lead to recalculations by changing the 'price' of behavior," (Tannewald 2007, 45). In this formulation, consistent with rationalist interpretations of international relations, norms circumscribe states' behavior while