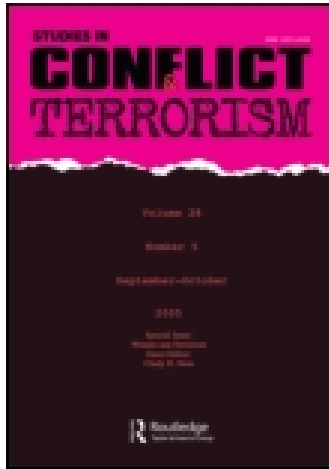


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Explaining Divergent Attitudes Toward Lethal Drone Strikes

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Although lethal drone strikes have become a central component of the U.S. campaign against international terrorism, the program remains a low salience issue with considerable bi-partisan consensus and a supportive U.S. general public. This article explains American attitudes toward lethal drone strikes by testing arguments based on partisanship and ideology, core values and abstract beliefs, and elite cues. Results suggest that respondent core values and governmental cues offer important insights. Consequently, the political environment under certain conditions may not frame important issues in such a way that the general public is likely to gain a knowledgeable understanding of the alternatives.

We need to start talking honestly about drones, the activities they enable and the strategic and legal frameworks in which these activities take place. Drone critics need to end their irrational insistence on viewing drones as somehow inherently “immoral.” But drone strike boosters also need to engage in a more honest conversation, and grapple with the argument that although drone strikes appear to offer cheap and low-risk “quick fix” approach to counterterrorism, they may well be doing the US as much harm as good.

—Rosa Brooks¹

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If war becomes unreal to the citizens of modern democracies, will they care enough to restrain and control the violence exercised in their name . . . if they and their sons and daughters are spared the hazards of combat?

—Michael Ignatieff²

The use of armed, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA), more commonly known as drones, to strike enemy targets has become a central component of the United States government's counterterrorism campaign. Worldwide, the use of lethal drone strikes is a highly controversial policy eliciting a strong negative reaction to American foreign policy in many countries. In the United States the use of such strikes is a relatively low salience issue with considerable bi-partisan support. Moreover, although the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has for years refused to confirm or deny the existence of the drone strike program and the Obama administration has argued for its continued secrecy in the courts, general public opinion in the United States is highly supportive of drone deployment. Recent public opinion polls report that nearly two thirds of Americans support the use of drone missile strikes to target extremists in other countries.³ This study seeks to explain individual-level support among the American public for lethal drone strikes.

Within a week following the 11 September 2001 attacks, Congress enacted in near unanimity The Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) with the intent of preventing future catastrophic attacks.⁴ On the legal and political basis of the AUMF, lethal drone strikes began in Yemen in 2002 and in Pakistan in 2004.⁵ Established during the George W. Bush administration, the drone program has "expanded exponentially" under President Barack Obama en route to becoming "one of his key national security tools."⁶ As of October 2014, according to unofficial statistics, at least 103 drone strikes in Yemen since 2002 have led to approximately 495 enemy and 105 civilian deaths.⁷ In Pakistan, more than 352 drone strikes since 2008 have killed more than 136 civilians and nearly 2,500 Taliban, Al Qaeda, and other operatives.⁸ Bergen and Rowland report that "By mid-2010, the drone program accelerated from an average of one strike every 40 days to one every 4."⁹ Given such growth, analysts lament that policies guiding lethal drone strikes have not been thought through more carefully. As Michael Boyle concedes, "the United States has yet to engage in a serious analysis of the strategic costs and consequences of its use of drones, both for its own security and for the rest of the world."¹⁰

Social scientists know a great deal about the structure of foreign policy attitudes toward internationalism, war, and the use of force in general, yet surprisingly little about mass attitudes toward the use of lethal drone strikes and the drone program. Despite relatively solid aggregate-level support for drone strikes, overall public opinion may reveal a substantial lack of understanding of the complexities of the issue. Micah Zenko suggests that "both American and international publics often misunderstand how drones are used."¹¹ This article presents a model to account for both the specific nature of public opinion on U.S. lethal drone strikes and a general theoretic perspective on comparable situations. It suggests the political environment under certain conditions may not frame important issues in such a way that the general public is encouraged to consider alternatives. Thus, in a highly charged partisan environment, where popular channels of public communication are strongly utilized by party (electoral) forces and their media allies, the general public will be exposed to public policy choices that primarily serve the interests of partisanship. Since an

issue like lethal drone strikes offers relatively little partisan traction for either Republicans or Democrats, it is unlikely that the general public will hear much about the pros or cons of the issue.

Consequently, one might expect that partisan variables will have relatively little explanatory value. Absent strong partisan divides and conflicting messages from political elites, we expect respondent attitudes toward the drone program will be primarily an expression of several factors, including underlying citizen predispositions toward American foreign and military policy, the influence of elite cues, and the degree of one's political attentiveness. As Hurwitz and Peffley¹² demonstrated in a series of articles, we argue that individuals rely on their core values, psychological dispositions and abstract beliefs when structuring policy attitudes toward the drone program. That is, citizen attitudes are likely informed by general cultural and psychological factors, and the low salience of the issue will generate a relatively high number of "don't know" responses. In addition, we anticipate that when asked to express an opinion on the use of drones, the general public will likely fall back on "source cues" related to their general disposition toward political objects (e.g., the military, technology, extremists). Such cues become important heuristics in helping citizens form opinions on novel or low salience issues.¹³ As Mondak points out, "Source cues guide opinion direction because they link new judgments to citizens' existing political beliefs."¹⁴

The following two sections provide a brief overview of recent opinion polls concerning drone strikes and a short discussion of the historical and political context for such strikes. Several individual level hypotheses are then derived from the extant literature and tested using nationwide data from a 2012 poll from the Pew Global Attitudes Project. Findings indicate several important patterns exist regarding support for lethal drone strikes. In the absence of strong partisan framing, we find limited support for partisan and ideological explanations. Instead, we find a strong connection between respondent core foreign policy values, attitudes, and beliefs and drone program support. Namely, the assertion of the nation's interests, whether through the promotion of democracy or free markets, the spread of American ideas and ideals, or the support of punishing attacks on perceived enemies, strengthens one's belief in the rightness of the national purpose and reassures the citizen that he or she is indeed part of a powerful and protective whole. In the absence of strong partisan framing, we also find that citizens receive important governmental cues. In our view then, lethal drone strikes, viewed as an aggressive military strategy, will appeal to strong feelings of nationalism, a preference for action over against restraint, and generally align with respondent foreign policy core values and abstract beliefs.

The Political Context of the Drone Strike Program

Understanding attitudes toward drone strikes is an important issue for several reasons. First, the drone program has apparently worked quite well from a tactical and national security standpoint.¹⁵ As Daniel Byman contends, "The Obama administration relies on drones for one simple reason: they work."¹⁶ According to Byman, "The drones have done their job remarkably well: by killing key leaders and denying terrorists sanctuaries in Pakistan, Yemen, and, to a lesser degree, Somalia, drones have devastated al Qaeda and associated anti-American militant groups. And they have done so at little financial cost, at no risk to U.S. forces, and with fewer civilian casualties than many alternative methods would have caused."¹⁷ CIA Director John Brennan, one of the key architects of the current program, has argued, "I think there is a misimpression on the part of some of American people

who believe that we take strikes to punish terrorists for past transgressions—nothing could be further from the truth. We only take such actions as a last resort to save lives when there's no other alternative to taking an action that's going to mitigate that threat."¹⁸

Second, although the drone strike program has emerged as a critical national security tool, it has thus far functioned with minimal transparency and relatively little public debate. As Micah Zenko points out, "the U.S. government has not provided a clear explanation of how drone strikes in non-battlefield settings are coordinated with broader foreign policy objectives, the scope of legitimate targets, and the legal framework."¹⁹ Operationally, the CIA maintains responsibility for implementing the lethal drone strike program in Pakistan, while the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) operates the program in Yemen and Somalia. This distinction is important because CIA strikes are legally classified under Title 50 of the United States Code as covert actions, which do not have to be publicly disclosed or acknowledged.²⁰ Conversely, strikes by the U.S. armed forces are governed by Title 10 of the U.S. Code, and subject to different, and more transparent, reporting requirements.²¹ While defending the secrecy of the program against Freedom of Information requests in the courts, President Barack Obama has acknowledged, "The very precision of drone strikes and the necessary secrecy often involved in such actions can end up shielding our government from the public scrutiny that a troop deployment invites. It can also lead a President and his team to view drone strikes as a cure-all for terrorism."²² After more than a decade of lethal operations, no congressional committee has conducted hearings on non-battlefield targeted killings.²³

Third, administrative differences over the drone program have important implications regarding agency mission, operational control and oversight. For instance, CIA Director Brennan has acknowledged that the use of the drone warfare program has greatly altered the CIA's fundamental mission over the past decade. Most pointedly, the agency's drone strike program has shifted focus and resources away from its traditional missions of intelligence gathering and strategic analysis.²⁴ Further, Congress and the Obama administration have differed with regard to operational control and oversight of the drone program.²⁵ In early 2014, for instance, Congress opposed Obama administration efforts to transfer control of the drone program from the CIA to the Defense Department.²⁶

Finally, the increased use of lethal drone strikes actually evolved as a form of political expediency. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, as American intelligence operatives and military personnel came under intense political pressure over the use of enhanced interrogation tactics such as sleep deprivation, water boarding, and extraordinary rendition to obtain valuable intelligence information, drone strikes became a way to evade mounting domestic and international public and political scrutiny. *New York Times* reporter Mark Mazzetti points out, "Killing by remote control was the antithesis of the dirty, intimate work of interrogation. Before long the C.I.A. would go from being the long-term jailer of America's enemies to a military organization that erased them. Not long before, the agency had been deeply ambivalent about drone warfare."²⁷ This policy context is critical in the context of understanding public attitudes on this issue, particularly as Micah Zenko observes, "Compared to Bush-era counterterrorism policies, drone strikes are vulnerable to similar—albeit largely still untapped—moral outrage, and they are even more susceptible to political constraints because they occur in plain sight."²⁸ Despite such concerns, with few exceptions,²⁹ there remains a dearth of empirically driven, individual-level studies of attitudes toward the use of lethal drone strikes.

Explaining Individual Attitudes toward Drone Strikes

We argue that the American public has been exposed to very little public discourse associated with lethal drone strikes. Unlike other foreign policy issues, the drone program has low salience, limited transparency and has elicited minimal partisan framing, factors typically critical in shaping public attitudes. Therefore, we offer several alternative explanations, including psychological dispositions, core values, abstract beliefs, elite cues and political attentiveness that can provide the basis of an explanation for individual-level attitudes toward the use of lethal drone strikes.

A Partisan/Ideological Explanation

We start by examining the case for partisan and ideological explanations. As Angus Campbell and colleagues pointed out more than five decades ago, partisan identification provides an important “perceptual screen” for filtering and interpreting political information.³⁰ Such “enduring partisan commitments” are critical in shaping individual attitudes on political matters and provide an important element of attitudinal consistency.³¹ As a fundamental perceptual screen, partisanship essentially serves as a political “schema” for interpreting information about public policies.³² In specific terms, Republicans are traditionally seen as “internationalists” to denote their general support for assertive foreign policy approaches, whereas Democrats have long been characterized as foreign policy “accommodationists.”³³ Holsti and Rosenau note that this relationship “has strengthened rather than eroded” since the 1970s.³⁴

Although the notion that “politics stops at the water’s edge” was “always more myth than reality,”³⁵ there has been an increasing partisan cleavage in American foreign policy since the 1960s.³⁶ While recognizing that partisan loyalties “rarely divided” Americans from the Truman through early Johnson presidential administrations, the period since the end of the Vietnam War “has witnessed striking partisan differences” on foreign policy issues.³⁷ For instance, Republican respondents are much more likely to support the use of military force against terrorist organizations than Democrats.³⁸ Republicans have also been found to be more likely than Democrats to be supportive of military action in both Iraq³⁹ and in Afghanistan.⁴⁰ Research has found conservatives more likely to support military action in Afghanistan, while other research does not test for the effects of ideology with respect to military action in Iraq.⁴¹ In the specific context of support for assassination, Republicans more likely than Democrats or Independents to concur with the statement, “The U.S. should order the CIA to assassinate known terrorists.”⁴²

On the basis of previous research linking partisan and ideological factors with attitudes toward foreign policy interventionism, including assassination, we posit that Republicans should be more likely than Democrats to approve of the use of lethal drone strikes. Further, Conservatives should be more likely than Liberals to support drone usage.

Alternative Explanations in Explaining Support for Lethal Drone Strikes

What is significant from our perspective, however, is the limited extent to which these factors are expected to be correlated with approval or disapproval of drone deployment. As argued above, the drone program has not been aggressively framed by partisan forces. That is, easily identified party spokespeople and their media allies have generally not highlighted a contrasting Republican and Democrat position with respect to the use of drones, stressing

the importance and value of their own party's position as it affects the national interest. In a highly charged partisan environment, the public will generally be exposed to public policy frames that primarily serve the interests of partisanship as issues are presented in an explanatory context (i.e., a frame) that demonstrates the wisdom of "our" policy approach over "theirs." That an issue such as lethal drone strikes has not entered into such a partisan discourse, and has even been pushed to the margins of public discussion, can be explained by its limited utility for either party. Republicans, while normally championing aggressive military measures, may see support of drone strikes as too close to an endorsement of the Obama foreign policy and thus a weakening of their general narrative of a failed presidency. Conversely, Democrats may be wary of bringing into focus an issue that might alienate parts of their base. Thus the issue is likely seen, and here we can only surmise, by both parties as one that will give them little partisan advantage. Given that neither Republicans nor Democrats are likely to bring the issue to the attention of the general public, and given that in the present highly charged political environment issues that are not partisan based have little traction, a serious discussion of the pros and cons of lethal drone strikes is unlikely to reach the general public.

Consequently, citizen attitudes on this issue should represent a primary expression of at least two other factors: (a) core foreign policy values, attitudes, and beliefs of citizens and (b) citizen attentiveness to important cues from governmental elites. In the case of the former, such explanations are consistent with the work of Goren, who demonstrates that "most citizens use core principles to derive issue preferences."⁴³ With regard to the latter, when developing opinions on novel issues—such as the lethal drone strike program—the politically aware are less likely to be swayed by "easy cues" and more likely to rely on an issue-relevant value in the formation of opinion."⁴⁴ Using an experimental design, Kam shows that as political awareness increases, one's reliance on party cues decreases.⁴⁵ Consequently, the drone issue presents a good opportunity to test Zaller's "mainstream effect"⁴⁶ linking political attentiveness to policy support in instances where political elites remain in policy agreement. Each of these alternative arguments is developed further below.

Core Values and Foreign Policy Attitudes

Scholarly research has demonstrated that there are limits to using ideology in explaining the structuring of political beliefs, suggesting that preferences toward the use of lethal drone strikes may also be explained by examining respondent core beliefs, attitudes and values in the realm of foreign policy.⁴⁷ Goren defines core beliefs as "general descriptive beliefs about human nature and society in matters of public affairs" and core values as "evaluative standards citizens use to judge alternative social and political arrangements."⁴⁸ Consistent with the work of Hurwitz and Peffley, we argue that individuals will likely rely on their core values, attitudes, and abstract foreign policy beliefs when structuring their attitudes toward low salience issues such as the use of lethal drone strikes.⁴⁹

Since the founding of the republic, American foreign policy has been built on the tripartite foundation of promoting democracy, enhancing prosperity, and ensuring security. In their study of the principal components of the "American ethos," McClosky and Zaller assert that capitalism and democracy are "two major traditions of belief . . . (that) have dominated the life of the American nation from its inception."⁵⁰ In marrying capitalism and democracy, Christopher Layne describes American foreign policymakers' vision of an "Open Door world" to include "an international system (or world order) made up of states that are open and subscribe to the United States' liberal values and institutions and that are open to U.S. economic penetration."⁵¹ As Layne points out, "the Open Door blurs the

line demarcating domestic politics from foreign policy because the security of America's core values is seen as being tied not only to the distribution of power in the international system, but even more, to economic expansion abroad and to the outside world's openness to America's liberal ideology."⁵²

Layne's arguments evoking Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis provide an excellent parallel for considering attitudes toward counterterrorism and lethal drone strikes. Turner described the frontier as "the boundary between savagery and civilization." Similarly, historian Brooks Adams, whose ideas later influenced George Kennan's containment policy, the Truman Doctrine, and the Marshall Plan, referred to the frontier as the nexus between "barbarism and civilization." Diplomatic historian William Appleton Williams later opined, "Turner gave Americans a nationalistic world view that eased their doubts, settled their confusions, and justified their aggressiveness. The frontier thesis was a bicarbonate of soda for emotional and intellectual indigestion."⁵³ For Louis Hartz, the frontier was where the spirit of Locke could triumph, thus explaining the reluctance of Americans to expect an easy conversion of the rest of the world to American core values.⁵⁴ This suggests a curious and important contradiction in American outreach to the world. By assuming both the naturalness of the values of democracy and capitalism and their unique development in the "land of the free," this view serves to confirm the value and meaning of an American national identity.⁵⁵

Consistent with such imagery, President George W. Bush was quite explicit in connecting American core values to antiterror efforts in 2004 when he remarked, "Part of winning the war on terror is spreading freedom and democracy." The 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States* declares that in combatting terrorism, a U.S. goal will be to "expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy."⁵⁶ As the *National Security Strategy* text demonstrates, strong national identity transcends partisan differences while providing many people with a sense of meaning and purpose. Defense of the nation's interests, whether the spread of democracy, the extension of free markets or punishing attacks on its enemies, both strengthens one's belief in the rightness of the national purpose and reassures the patriot that he or she is indeed an active part of a greater whole, marching in the "vanguard of freedom." In so affirming and defending these values citizens are offered an enhanced personal meaning as well as an emotional share in the nation's successes.

Consistent with the foregoing and in the context of the drone program, there may also be a pro-military narrative that asserts the importance of the use of force in international relations, viewing diplomacy as weakness, and "the enemies" as only, or primarily, thwarted by the threat of physical punishment. This is accentuated by the parallel tendency to view the enemy as those forces embedded in foreign states that oppose the ideals of American culture, democracy and free market economic transactions. If left to grow and spread, such opposition poses a direct threat to American leadership in the world as well as the benefits of security and prosperity that such leadership entails. While this has been an aspect of both Democratic and Republican thinking, there is a nationalism that views effective military action as a mark of the power of the state. Such nationalism tends to replace a sense of individual powerlessness with the power and success of the state.

A number of scholars have identified two core dimensions in characterizing foreign policy attitudes when it comes to the use of force—militant internationalism and cooperative internationalism.⁵⁷ The essential elements of cooperative internationalism are attitudes toward détente and toward active cooperation with other nations.⁵⁸ Conversely, militant internationalism is built on the premise of military force, coercion, and a muscular American foreign policy role. On this basis, core foreign policy values and beliefs of respondents

should greatly influence their attitudes toward lethal drone strikes since such an aggressive military response is presumably done to prevent future terrorism and advance the national interest. Specifically, we contend that those respondents who favor U.S. democracy promotion efforts (Democracy) as well as the spreading of American ideas and ideals (Ideas) around the world should be more likely to approve of lethal drone strikes. Similarly, those respondents who favor the use of free markets (FreeMarket) over other allocation mechanisms should also be more likely to approve of the use of lethal drone strikes. From the perspective of militarism, we further expect that those respondents who express a general preference for military interventions over diplomatic solutions (Military) should also be supportive of the use of lethal drone strikes. Finally, given their unilateral nature, we expect that attitudes toward lethal drone strikes should inversely correspond with one's sentiment toward the United Nations (UN).

Elite Cues and Political Attentiveness

Evidence suggests that citizens also heed important messages on foreign policy issues from political elites.⁵⁹ Darmofal acknowledges that "because of affective biases, many citizens are not free cue takers, but rather, are tethered to specific elites."⁶⁰ Thus, if a given foreign policy issue is framed as an act of the government and in the absence of partisan conflict, those who believe that the government is composed of highly regarded individuals, who should in general be trusted, will support the policy. At times, a citizen's cue from a particular elite may take precedent over the substance of the policy issue. Indeed, as Kuklinski and Hurley point out, "although the rationality and economy of cue-taking are now well established, it is very possible that citizens-as-cue-takers focus so heavily on the 'who' that the 'what' recedes to the background."⁶¹

The importance of interpreting elite cues is especially important when there is elite consensus on a given foreign policy issue. As Brody points out, when elites "rally to the president" in support of the president's position or "run for cover" in failing to offer either a dissenting view or criticism of the president's foreign policy position, "the public will be given the implied or explicit message . . . (that) . . . the president is doing his job well."⁶² This observation is consistent with Larson's contention that "the credibility of the president's argument is established to a great extent by the Greek chorus of members of Congress, experts, and other pundits who either support or refute the president's position."⁶³ More recently, Berinsky argues, "when elites come to a common interpretation of a political reality, the public gives them great latitude to wage war."⁶⁴ In this case, those who would tend to support the president's foreign policy program, regardless of party, should rely on the fact that this is foreign policy of our government as an important cue when it comes to thinking about a lower salience issue such as lethal drone strikes. Therefore, we argue that citizens who generally support the foreign policies of the president (ObamaFP) should also be more likely to support the use of lethal drone strikes. This implies that feelings toward the president's foreign policy program can be perceived as separate from feelings toward the president himself. That is, affect toward the president is potentially independent of the judgment as to the fitness of the U.S. government to conduct foreign policy. Therefore, in order to isolate the influence of sentiment toward Obama's foreign policy from affect toward the president himself, we include a measure of presidential approval (Obama) to control for this possibility. We contend that citizens may differentiate their affect toward the president from the foreign policy of their government.

Finally, in addition to such elite cues and absent more specific partisan framing, we argue that one's level of political attentiveness should also be an important predictor of

support for the drone program. Specifically, we assert that the lack of partisan division over the drone program presents a good opportunity to test Zaller's "mainstream effect." Using the long duration of the Vietnam War, Zaller shows how elite discourse was effective in shaping public views toward the war.⁶⁵ In the early part of the conflict, elite consensus coincided with high levels of war support. Yet, as elite opinion and messaging began to diverge, support for the war increasingly broke along partisan lines. Zaller found, however, that those most attentive to the war sided with elites that most closely reflected their partisan orientations. In the case of lethal drone strikes where elites are currently not highly divided, as Zaller has argued, we expect more highly informed and attentive respondents to be more likely to support the president's foreign policy, regardless of their political predispositions. In doing so, we anticipate finding a relationship between political attentiveness and reliance on partisan cues. Therefore, we argue that the more politically attentive respondents (Attentive) should be more likely to support the policies of the government in the absence of elite discord. Likewise, those with higher levels of Education should also be more likely to support the widespread use of drones.

Data, Method, and Results

To test these propositions, we use survey data from the 20 March–4 April 2012 Pew Research Global Attitudes Project.⁶⁶ The survey utilizes a national probability sample using a variation of random-digit dialing (RDD) with primary sampling units (PSUs) consisting of blocks of telephone numbers, both land-lines and cell phones, and is stratified by county.⁶⁷ Conducted in early 2012, the survey should produce a fair and timely assessment of sentiment toward drone strikes in the particular target countries. The survey also has a large sample size with 1,011 respondents.

The question used for the dependent variable in this empirical analysis is straightforward. Respondents were asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia?" Nearly two thirds of the respondents (62.7 percent) answered "approve" while 26.7 percent answered "disapprove." Approximately 10 percent indicated an answer of "don't know/refused." The 107 respondents who answered "don't know" or refused to answer the question were excluded from our analysis. As listwise deletion is used for other missing observations in the data, we analyze 740 valid cases.

A logistic regression model is estimated to determine how well the hypotheses explain the variation in individual attitudes toward the use of drone strikes against extremists in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. Logistic regression is valuable to the extent that it can show differences in likelihood (probability) of support for a position, while holding other factors constant. Thus, in addition to the explanatory variables described above, we control for several variables about which we have no *a priori* expectations but are routinely associated with foreign policy decisions—gender, race, and age. Together, we argue that these explanatory variables should provide important insight into better understanding mass sentiment toward the lethal drone strikes in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. The operationalization of each variable is described in Appendix A and summary statistics are described in Appendix B.

Since logistic regression coefficients are not easily interpreted, Table 1 reports unstandardized coefficients, robust standard errors and the marginal change associated with the explanatory variables.⁶⁸ The marginal effect refers to the change in predicted probability for

Table 1
Logit model estimates

	Coeff.	Robust std. error	P> z	Marginal effect
Partisan & Ideological Explanation				
Republican	.660	.331	.046	.120
Democrat	-.086	.324	.791	-.016
Ideology	-.129	.113	.254	-.098
Foreign Policy Core Values				
Democracy	.331	.195	.090	.064
FreeMarket	.155	.076	.042	.122
Ideas	.801	.218	.000	.168
UN	-.160	.080	.044	-.117
Military	.992	.188	.000	.197
Elite Cues & Political Attentiveness				
ObamaFP	.729	.308	.018	.138
Obama	.184	.338	.585	.035
Attentive	-.192	.107	.073	-.113
Education	.010	.052	.844	.013
Controls				
Male	.787	.186	.000	.146
White	.394	.233	.091	.078
Age	-.002	.006	.669	-.035
Constant	-1.079	.829	.193	

Notes. $N = 740$. Wald $\chi^2(15) = 106.99$. Prob. $> \chi^2 = 0.000$. Log pseudolikelihood = -376.43 . Pseudo $R^2 = 0.154$. Source. Pew Research Global Attitudes Project (2012).

Dependent Variable = Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia? Responses are coded as (1) Approve and (0) Disapprove.

Figures are unstandardized coefficients shown alongside robust standard errors and z-test probability values. The marginal effect refers to the change in predicted probability for the independent variable of interest as it shifts from its lowest to highest value when holding all other explanatory variables at their means.⁶⁹ Coefficients in bold are those with $p > .05$.

the independent variable of interest as it shifts from its lowest to highest value when holding all other explanatory variables at their means. The predicted probability that respondents will indicate approval of the lethal use of drone strikes can also be calculated. For the entire sample, the predicted probability for a given respondent of answering approve is 75 percent.

First, we find confirmation for our prediction that partisan factors play only a minor role in shaping public opinion on drone deployment, finding limited empirical support for the political explanation based on partisanship. While the coefficient on the *Republican* variable produces a positive and statistically significant result in the predicted direction, we find that those who self-identify as Republicans or lean Republican are more likely than Democrats or Independents to support the use of lethal drone strikes. In marginal terms, model results indicate that Republicans are 12 percent more likely than non-Republicans to indicate approval. Although in the predicted direction, the coefficients on our variables for

Democratic partisans and ideology do not produce effects that are statistically discernable from zero.

Second, we find strong support for our foreign policy attitudes explanation on the basis of core values, attitudes, and abstract beliefs. All five explanatory factors in this category are in the predicted direction and statistically significant. We also find significant marginal effects for questions that suggest preferences for utilizing military intervention, spreading American ideas or support for the United Nations. Specifically, respondents who favor the spreading of American ideas worldwide are 16.8 percent more likely to approve lethal drone strikes than those who do not, just as those who support U.S. democracy promotion are 6.4 percent more likely to approve drone strikes relative to those who do not favor democracy promotion efforts. Similarly, we find support for linking a predisposition for free markets to support for lethal drone strikes. Respondents who concur that most people are better off in a free market economy are 12.2 percent more likely to approve of lethal drone strikes than those who do not. Fourth, as expected, those respondents indicating favorability of the United Nations are 11.7 percent less likely to approve the use of lethal drone strikes. The indicator with the largest marginal effect in our entire model, however, is the preference for military intervention over finding diplomatic solutions. Specifically, respondents who generally favor the use of military intervention are 19.7 percent more likely to approve of the drone strikes. We view this as a predisposition for a foreign policy that is aggressive with regard to military intervention, coupled with a corresponding skepticism as to the use of multilateral diplomacy.

Third, we also find support for our elite cue explanation. Specifically, those who favor President Obama's foreign policy program are 13.8 percent more likely to approve of lethal drone strikes than those who do not favor the president's foreign policies when controlling for other factors. The marginal effect for this variable is one of the largest in our model. Thus, in finding a strong positive relationship between support for the administration's international policies and support of drone use, we interpret this as a predisposition to support the government, independent of both one's affect toward the president himself and all other considerations. Our control measure for affect toward President Obama himself was not discernable from zero.

Fourth, our arguments in support of the mainstream effect are not supported. We find a mild, inverse connection between political attentiveness and support for lethal drone strikes. We also find no empirical relationship between education and drone support.

Finally, among our control variables, the dummy variable for gender, *Male*, produces a positive and significant coefficient, indicating that males are more likely to be supportive of the use of lethal drone strikes than females. The influence of being male (14.6 percent) has one of the greatest marginal influences of any variable in the model. Similarly, we find weak empirical support for our race variable, *White*, as White respondents are 7.8 percent more likely than non-White respondents to support lethal drone strikes. We also find no empirical relationship between age and drone support.

Discussion

Since 2002, the drone program has become an important weapon in U.S. counterterrorism efforts. As Byman acknowledges, "drone warfare is here to stay, and it is likely to expand in the years to come as other countries' capabilities catch up with those of the United States."⁷⁰ While the use of lethal drone strikes has been hotly debated within American foreign policy circles, general public opinion in the United States remains highly supportive. Further, the general narrative associated with the lethal drone strike program seems to resonate

in different ways with the overall population. Consequently, opinion polling can provide insights into the ways in which it is perceived and might well offer an indication as to how it might be interpreted if it were to achieve a higher level of attention.

A better understanding of public opinion toward the use of lethal drone strikes by the United States is an important prerequisite for considering how attitudes of Americans may differ from respondents in other countries. We present this analysis to shed further insight into individual-level factors that influence sentiment toward the use of lethal drone strikes in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, and to explore the factors that influence attitudes toward foreign policy when intense partisanship captures important channels for public education and tends to block all but those issues that provide for partisan advantage.

Specifically, while we find that those who identify themselves as Republican are more likely to support the use of lethal drone strikes as expected, we find limited empirical support for additional partisan and ideological factors as a basis for influencing sentiment toward the use of lethal drone strikes. On the other hand, we find strong support for the factors included in our model associated with core values, attitudes and abstract foreign policy beliefs. For instance, factors such as a preference for military intervention over diplomatic solutions to foreign policy problems, support for free markets and the promotion of democracy, support for the spreading of American ideas and ideals, and a relative distaste for the United Nations all correspond with a greater likelihood of approving the use of lethal drone strikes. Thus, in the absence of partisan divisions, we find empirical support for our argument that Americans rely on core values and abstract foreign policy beliefs when conceptualizing a position on the use of lethal drone strikes. This finding is consistent with Tony Smith's contention that "America has formulated frameworks for world order in which the promotion of democracy plays a conspicuous role. The emphases on global security, the world market, and international law and organizations figure prominently alongside the call for national, democratic self-determination."⁷¹

We also find support for a key government cue in the sense that those who are supportive of the President's foreign policies are more likely to be supportive of the lethal drone program. This is a particularly important finding, particularly since drone warfare has become a central component of the U.S. government's campaign against international terrorism through both Republican and Democratic presidential administrations. In his highest profile public comments on the drone program during a May 2103 speech at the National Defense University, President Barack Obama asserted, "Any U.S. military action in foreign lands risks creating more enemies and impacts public opinion overseas. Moreover, our laws constrain the power of the President even during wartime, and I have taken an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States." This type of rhetorical framing transcends partisan divisions while emphasizing national security considerations. Finally, we find a significant gender difference indicating that important demographic divides also differentiate attitudes toward using lethal drone strikes.

We interpret these results to suggest the value of further research on attitudes toward lethal drone strikes. We see evidence for the possibility that intense personal identification with the nation, as a source of personal worth or value, correlates with support for a display of military strength and regard for admiration by the people of other nations. Such a finding has important broader implications, particularly as Boyle sharply concludes, "Over time, an excessive reliance on drones will deepen the reservoirs of anti-US sentiment, embolden America's enemies and provide other governments with a compelling public rationale to resist a US-led international order which is underwritten by sudden, blinding strikes from

Table 2
Drone strike attitudes as basis for concern

How concerned are you, if at all, about whether U.S. drone strikes:	Very or somewhat concerned (%)	Not too or not at all concerned (%)
Are being conducted illegally		
Approve of drone strikes	57.3	38.5
Disapprove of drone strikes	81.1	16.1
Endanger the lives of innocent civilians		
Approve	76.4	22.2
Disapprove	93.1	6.5
Could lead to retaliation from extremist groups		
Approve	56.8	41.4
Disapprove	82.3	15.3
Could damage America's reputation around the world		
Approve	45.3	53.3
Disapprove	78.6	19.8

Notes. Dependent Variable = Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia?

Responses are subdivided among those who approve and disapprove of U.S. drone strikes. Those answering "don't know" or refusing to answer the question are excluded. $N = 820$.

Source. Pew Research (2013).

the sky. For the United States, preventing these outcomes is a matter of urgent importance in a world of rising powers and changing geopolitical alignments.⁷²

Thinking More Broadly About Attitudes Toward Drone Strikes

Despite concerns the "The U.S. government has articulated its drone policy to the public only in an ad hoc manner,"⁷³ opinion polls such as the one analyzed in this study indicate that majorities of Americans support the use of drone strikes. A February 2013 Pew Research Center national opinion poll asks respondents, "Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia?" Poll results indicate that 57 percent of Americans approve of the drone missile strikes, while just 24.7 percent of respondents indicated disapproval and nearly 20 percent of respondents (18.3 percent) either indicated "don't know" or refused to answer.⁷⁴

The same poll also asks respondents how concerned they felt about a number of aspects associated with drone strikes, including their degree of concern over whether the strikes (a) are being conducted legally, (b) endanger the lives of innocent civilians, (c) could lead to retaliation from extremist groups, and (d) could damage America's reputation around the world. Responses along the four point scale ranged from "very concerned" to "not at all concerned." Table 2 summarizes the degree of respondent concerns based on the four questions by differentiating respondents who approve of drone strikes from those who do not. Not surprisingly, as Table 2 illustrates, those who disapprove of drone strikes comprise a higher proportion of respondents who are very or somewhat concerned in each of the four

Table 3
Attitudes toward the U.S. use of drone strikes in 20 countries, 2012 (row%)

Country	Approve	Disapprove	Don't know	Refused	Total
United States	62.7	26.7	7.9	2.7	1,011
Britain	43.2	47.4	8.2	1.3	1,018
India	40.6	23.0	32.9	3.5	4,018
Poland	37.6	49.9	12.4	0.2	1,001
Germany	36.6	60.2	1.6	1.6	1,000
France	35.6	64.1	0.1	0.2	1,004
Czech Republic	32.1	59.9	5.4	2.6	1,000
Italy	31.1	57.5	9.5	2.0	1,074
Mexico	24.8	72.3	2.6	0.3	1,200
Lebanon	23.5	69.0	7.0	0.5	1,000
China	22.2	59.8	15.9	2.1	3,177
Japan	21.6	75.3	3.1	0.0	700
Spain	21.2	76.0	2.0	0.8	1,000
Brazil	18.3	77.0	4.8	0.0	800
Russia	17.2	67.1	14.8	0.9	1,000
Tunisia	12.3	72.4	14.4	0.9	1,000
Turkey	10.4	80.6	7.2	1.8	1,001
Egypt	6.3	88.7	5.0	0.0	1,000
Jordan	5.9	85.0	7.6	1.5	1,000
Greece	5.1	90.2	4.5	0.2	1,000
Total	27.1%	59.4%	12.0%	1.5%	100%
	6,779	14,839	3,002	384	25,004

Source. Pew Research Global Attitudes Project (2012).

categories than those who approve of drone strikes. For instance, of those who disapprove of drone strikes, 93.1 percent indicate they are very or somewhat concerned that such strikes endanger the lives of innocent civilians. Of those who approve of U.S. drone strikes, a markedly lower proportion (76.4 percent) are very or somewhat concerned that such strikes will endanger the lives of innocent civilians.

The results reveal an important divergence when examining respondent concerns about whether U.S. drone strikes could damage America's reputation around the world. Specifically, of those who approve of drone strikes, a majority (53.3 percent) indicated that they are not too or not at all concerned that such strikes could damage America's reputation around the world. Yet, for those who disapprove of drone strikes, as many as 20 percent of respondents (19.8 percent) are not too concerned or not at all concerned. Thus, while majorities of Americans continue to approve of lethal drone missile strikes, Americans also diverge on the perceived impact that such attacks will have on America's reputation around the world.

Perhaps not surprisingly, American lethal drone strikes are incredibly unpopular in other parts of the world. In a 2012 poll from the Pew Research Global Attitudes Project of respondents in twenty nations, the United States was the only country in which a majority of respondents (62.7 percent) approved of the United States use of drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.⁷⁵ As Table 3 illustrates, following the United States approval levels ranged from Britain (43.2 percent)—which conducts its

own lethal drone program—and India (40.6 percent) to just 5 percent approval in Greece. Support among Islamic nations with close ties to the United States such as Turkey (10.4 percent), Egypt (6.3 percent), and Jordan (5.9 percent) was also remarkably low.

Beyond their unpopularity outside of the United States, U.S. drone strikes also create unease in other countries. Boyle asserts that drone strikes “corrode the stability and legitimacy of local governments, deepen anti-American sentiment and create new recruits for Islamist networks aiming to overthrow these governments. Despite the fact that drone strikes are often employed against local enemies of the governments in Pakistan and Yemen, they serve as powerful signals of these governments’ helplessness and subservience to the United States and undermine the claim that these governments can be credible competitors for the loyalties of the population.”⁷⁶ For instance, while the Pakistani parliament voted in April 2012 to discontinue authorizing U.S. drone strikes, the U.S. has refused to comply with the body’s wishes.⁷⁷ Such practices may further contribute to worldwide polarization over drone warfare. As Bowen has acknowledged, “Among the central myths of the Obama era is that he has reshaped the global image of the United States, helping foreigners to view the country more favorably, hence disposing them to be more likely to cooperate with U.S. goals.”⁷⁸ Given these attitudinal divergences, it is not surprising, then, that Bergen and Rowland conclude, “Policymakers need to understand these ramifications [of the lethal drone strike program] and start having more substantive conversations regarding the program, and they need to do it quickly.”⁷⁹

Conclusion

Given the relative dearth of empirical research on attitudes toward the use of lethal drone strikes, there is much remaining work to be done by social scientists on a relevant research program currently not being systematically pursued. An initial important step in this direction is to continue asking meaningful survey questions to measure public support for lethal drone strikes, while at the same time posing questions that would also provide for more nuanced explanations. The limitations of the dependent variable used in this analysis are instructive in this regard. First, survey questions need to distinguish between specific characteristics of lethal drone strikes such as personality strikes, signature strikes, strikes against U.S. citizens, and the use of “double tap” strikes. Incorporating specific types of drone strikes and the context surrounding them would provide a clearer sense of respondent sentiment toward specific policy proposals. Second, although its policy orientation is welcome, the current question may inherently prime and/or frame for respondents elements that signal different cues to survey respondents leading to varying interpretations. For instance, the question used in this analysis explicitly references countries such as Pakistan and Yemen, which have been pivotal countries in the global war on terrorism. This specific reference may serve to conflate respondent attitudes with the broader global war on terrorism and influence how respondents conceptualize the issue in formulating a response to the question. Similarly, the reference to “extremists” in the question may artificially bias the perspective of survey respondents. Since citizens often rely on source cues as important heuristics in forming political judgments,⁸⁰ precise question wording may be helpful in minimizing the “opinion holding” and “opinion direction” of respondents. Such improved question wording will also enable social scientists to compare attitudes toward lethal drone strikes in the abstract with attitudes toward policies with implications of varying degrees.

While asking questions that serve as potential dependent variables is imperative, the importance of asking effective questions for explanatory purposes is equally critical. First, as is a starting point for much of the public opinion literature, ascertaining respondents’ general world view orientations—such as views on the roles of governments and markets,

preferences for isolationism and internationalism as well as for unilateralism and multilateralism, and views on the use of militarism—are important precursor for explaining and better understanding the policy attitudes and preferences of respondents.⁸¹ Second, since the use of lethal drone strikes is evidently a low salience issue for most Americans, it is valuable to discern survey respondents' levels of knowledge, political attentiveness and awareness, and overall salience regarding such strikes to provide both survey responses as well as a gauge of the impact of public awareness campaigns.

Finally, we offer this analysis as complement to extant scholarship on attitudes toward the use of force and toward internationalism, in comparative politics regarding the divergent attitudes toward drone strikes in many countries around the world, and in international relations over the ethical and technological considerations governing lethal drone strikes. Indeed, we see this analysis a preliminary step at both theorizing about the significance of individual-level factors associated with sentiment toward drone strikes as well as an empirical effort to better understand how attitudes toward low salience issues are developed in the absence of elite partisan framing or partisan source cues.

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Appendix A

Description of Dependent and Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

Support for Use of Lethal Drone Strikes—Respondents were asked: Do you approve (coded as 1) or disapprove (0) of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia?

Independent Variables

Republican/Democrat—In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent? As a follow up question to those who responding Independent, No

Preference or Other Party, as of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party? Responses of “Republican” or “Lean Republican” coded as 1 with 0 indicating all other respondents. Similarly, those responding with “Democrat” or “Lean Democrat” are coded as 1, and 0 indicates all other respondents.

Ideology—In general, would you describe your political views as. . . Very conservative (1), Conservative, Moderate, Liberal, or Very liberal (5)?

Democracy—I am going to read some phrases which have opposite meanings. Tell me which comes closer to describing your views. Item1: The United States should be promoting democracy around the world (coded as 1). Item2: The United States should not be promoting democracy around the world (coded as 0).

FreeMarket—Please tell me whether you completely agree (coded as 5), mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree (1) with the following statement—most people are better off in a free market economy, even though some people are rich and some are poor?

Ideas—Tell me which comes closer to describing your views. It’s good that American ideas and customs are spreading around the world (1). It’s bad that American ideas and customs are spreading around the world (0).

United Nations (UN)—Please tell me if you have a very unfavorable (1) . . . or very favorable (5) opinion of the United Nations?

Military—In your opinion, which is more important. . . Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even if it means taking military action (1) OR Avoiding a military conflict with Iran, even if it means they may develop nuclear weapons (0).

ObamaFP—Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the international policies of President Barack Obama? Responses are coded as (1) approve and (0) disapprove.

Obama—Would you like U.S. President Barack Obama to be reelected or not? Yes (1), No (0).

Attentive—How closely have you been following the news about the U.S. presidential race? Very closely (4). . . Not at all (1).

Education—Ranges from (1) less than high school to (8) postgraduate or professional degree.

Male—Dummy variable where 1 indicates Male and 0 indicates all other respondents.

White—Dummy variable where 1 indicates White self-identification and 0 indicates all other respondents.

Age—Age of respondent in years.

Appendix B**Summary Statistics**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Drone	904	.701	.457	0	1
Ideology	960	2.780	.987	1	5
Democrat	1011	.492	.500	0	1
Republican	1011	.372	.483	0	1
Obama	919	.515	.500	0	1
ObamaFP	987	.530	.499	0	1
Education	1004	4.648	1.859	1	8
Attentive	1007	2.034	.949	1	4
Democracy	1011	.630	.483	0	1
FreeMarkets	998	3.654	1.190	1	5
Ideas	936	.815	.388	0	1
UN	1011	3.244	1.309	1	5
Military	1011	.588	.492	0	1
Male	1011	.458	.498	0	1
White	1011	.787	.409	0	1
Age	996	52.306	18.819	18	93