





Next Generation Shapers is a network for emerging policy makers interested in conversations that explore connections between the nuclear debate and other global challenges.

Next Generation Shapers is a project of the British American Security Information Council.

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Learn more at *nextgenshapers.com*





NEXTGEN: FOCUS GROUPS

Between October 2014 and March 2015, BASIC hosted a series of discussions with US-and UK-based policy students and young professionals with different policy interests and areas of expertise.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The influence of early experience

Participants cited personal experience and academic learning - from early childhood to university - as being highly influential in shaping their opinions and developing their sense of idealism. They worried that transitioning into the policy world would mean sacrificing grand vision for short-term goals.

Personal connection and relevance

Personal stories made an impact. First hand experience and knowing someone directly impacted by an issue highly influenced interest.

Participants also sought out issues they perceived to be directly related to their personal lives or had a clear read-across to issues that mattered to them.

Clear goals and impact

Clearly defined goals inspired active engagement. Participants needed to know their personal contributions would make an impact, especially because so many were not sure about how to make substantive change.





Balance matters

Participants expressed a strong preference for balanced analysis: they wanted information that presented all angles of an issue, but allowed them to come to their own informed conclusion. A balanced, interactive, two-way process was likely to be more influential than the dictation of biased information. They were suspicious of overt activism and advocacy, which were largely perceived to be representative of one side of an argument only.

Convenience

Convenience is important. Participants were more likely to inform themselves about, or actively engage on an issue if the information or actions required were convenient. That said, they were skeptical about the impact of "clicktivism", which they believed raised awareness on a superficial level only.

Respected leaders influence thinking; celebrities don't

Celebrities from the entertainment industry were emphatically not influential in respondents' thinking on world issues. The exceptions to this were the Daily Show / Jon Stewart and John Oliver. Participants looked to leaders in their field (writers, unbiased journalists, policy experts, former government officials) to help shape their thinking.

Motivations

Participants were motivated by issues that inspired concern for others, that appealed to their sense of right and wrong or civic duty, or that sparked a sense of injustice or frustration. Some also responded well to issues that were perceived to be working towards something, as opposed to against something.



8 Actions

Participants identified key actions to be: learning, building awareness and passing information on. They were more likely to share well-structured and easy to read articles (e.g. "5 reasons..." or Buzzfeed style); short videos (no longer than two minutes); new or influential information; something controversial; or something involving a high profile individual. Some also suggested that they were more likely to share good news or positive stories.

Nuclear weapons

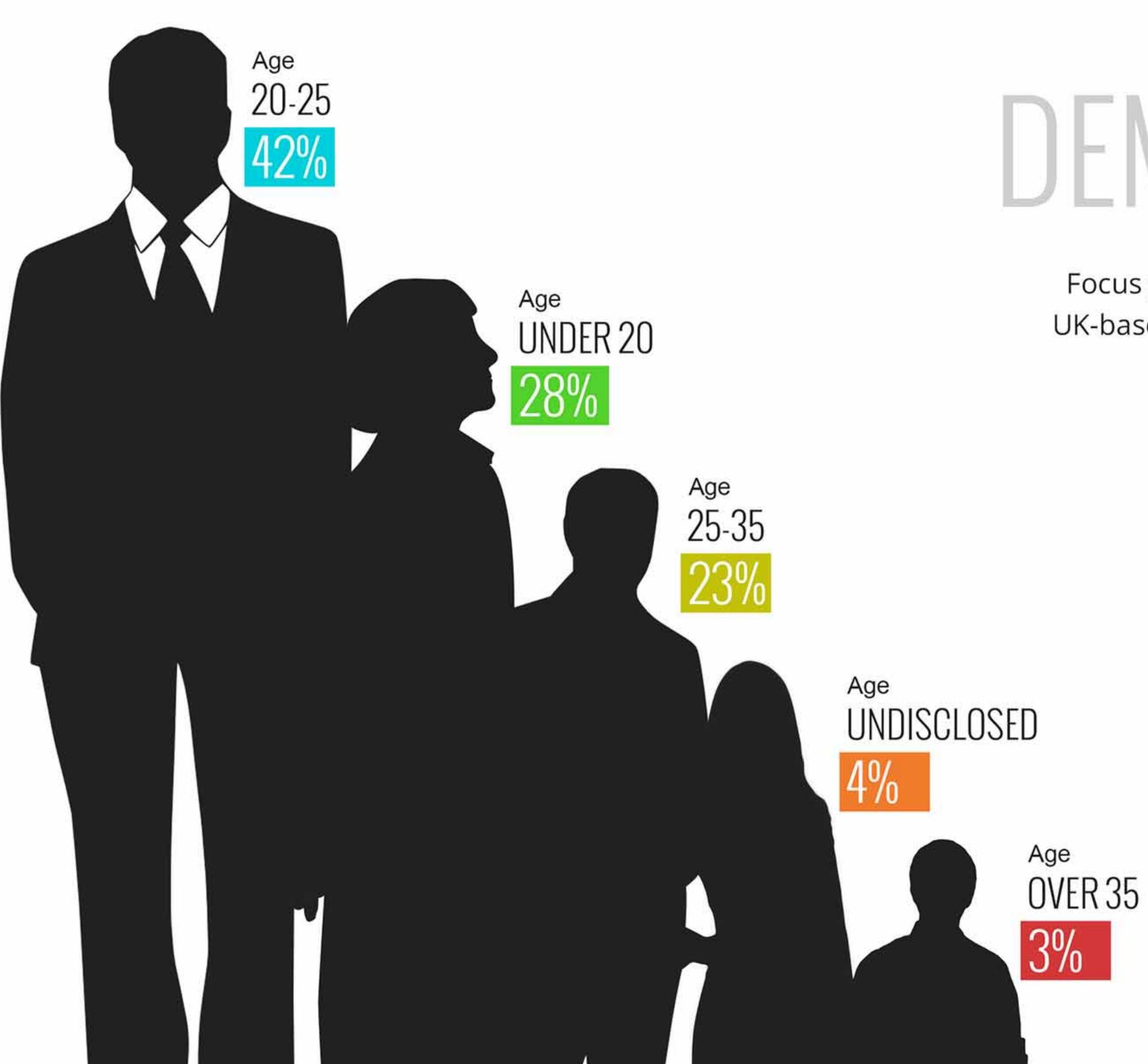
With a few exceptions, participants largely felt that their knowledge of or interest in nuclear weapons as a stand-alone issue was low. They put this down to them feeling unrelatable, intangible and no longer relevant. The face of warfare was changing and the risk of nuclear crisis seemed low.

Participants didn't feel that they could do much to change the status quo.
Where they did think about nuclear weapons, common contexts were Iran and North Korea. They also worried about unpredictability (nuclear terrorism and irrational actors), the actions of other nuclear players and proliferation.

They felt a false sense of security, and also questioned the interrelated impacts of nuclear weapons – including geopolitical costs and the possible impact of nuclear weapons policies on other weapons policies. Some also expressed frustration at the negative link that was regularly made between nuclear energy and nuclear weapons.



- Identify trends in the interests of emerging policy-makers, and better understand what influences and drives their engagement;
- Start exploring the connections between those wider concerns and nuclear weapons policy;
- Build a network of engaged individuals whose diverse backgrounds will enrich discussion and challenge assumptions about nuclear weapons policy.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Focus group participants were 38% US-based and 66% UK-based, with a gender split of 39% female, 61% male.

◆ The age breakdown was as follows

48% said they would be interested when nuclear weapons policy intersected with their areas of expertise.

54% of participants claimed to have either no knowledge of nuclear weapons policy, or a basic understanding.

Only 26% of participants expressed a high interest in nuclear weapons as a stand-alone issue.

39% believed they had conversational knowledge of nuclear weapons

22% said they were primarily interested only when nuclear weapons appeared in the news.

Only 1% of participants claimed deep understanding of Nuclear Weapons policy.

Interest Level in Nuclear Weapons Issues **Knowledge on** Nuclear Weapons Policy

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Participants' areas of study/work were varied & are loosely grouped as follows

81% were full time students, with varied international and domestic policy backgrounds (detailed below). 19% were working, volunteering or combining their time between study and work.

Equality

Gender violence, women's rights, racial equality, humanitarian affairs

Economics, international business, applied math

International affairs

Foreign affairs, diplomacy, international law, international relations, regional affairs (Latin America, Middle East, Europe)

Scientific Bio

Bioethics, biosecurity, clinical research, physics

Environment

Climate change, environment

Law and

leadership

Crisis leadership, law enforcement, law, post-conflict state-building

Security

Security politics, peace and security, national security, WMDs, non-proliferation and disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation policy, civil-military relations

Politics and philosophy

Philosophy, organizational behavior, politics and political thought

Development

International development, sustainable development, post-conflict state-building, humanitarian affairs

Other

Creative arts, journalism, history, education, architecture, smart cities

Business

International business, start-ups, technology

all participants expressed interest in remaining part of the NextGen network to explore the connections between nuclear weapons policy and their own areas of expertise.

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES

Interests

What Participants care about

Drivers

What informs their opinion

Actions

What actions they take (or believe they can take) to create change

Nuclear

What they know and think about the nuclear debate



"After an initial focus on personal issues, many respondents began to move to macro level policy concerns, namely: "

Inequality

- Inclusive and equal growth, development and global governance.
- 2 Individual equality
 (human rights, LGBT rights, gender inequality, and socioeconomic diversity in positions of power).
- 3 Societal equality
 (access to education,
 poverty reduction,
 access to emerging
 technologies (e.g.
 medical tech) in the
 developing world).
- 4 Equality on the international stage: the need for more balanced international power dynamics.

Environmental

- Climate change (seen as high consequence, but receiving limited attention).
- 2 Environmental degradation and destruction of world's eco-system.

Security

- Global instability, with a particular emphasis on conflict in the Middle East.
- 2 The rise of radical networks, non-state actors, terrorism and extremism.
- 3 A rise in nuclear power leading to a rise in risk of nuclear terrorism.

Structural issues

- Poor inter-state relationships.
- A lack of global governance and decline in international law: the world is changing but our international order hasn't been changing with it. Governing treaties are old and emerging issues are not being adequately addressed.
- 3 Government-citizen accountability and the risk of government corruption.

Development

1 The global economy, including western debt, Poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Emerging threats

- New illnesses and pandemics.
- 2 Emerging technologies, such as cyber-weapons and killer robots.
- World population growth, inadequate resources (water, oil), and food prices.

Economy

The daily effects of macroeconomic policies: interest rate changes, oil prices.

After an initial focus on personal issues, many respondents began to move to macro level policy concerns, namely:

Country-specific

- North Korea (from a human rights perspective), Ukraine, Iran, the future of Europe, Israel / Palestine, former Soviet states bordering Russia.
- Competition: the rise of China and Latin America – particularly as their international status develops.

Domestic

Micro-level issues that impact the individual: immigration, corruption, healthcare, social security, gun control, hurricane season, election predictions, the economy, affordable housing, education, youth unemployment, the housing market.

Information

- How to control the risks of data security and the way information is used.
- 2 The power of biased media and unfiltered information dissemination to cause public fear and panic (e.g. in the case of Ebola).

Political

- Political polarization.
- Uninformed voters and politicians.
- The disconnect between political elites and everyday reality.
- The influence of local politics and term limits on policy-making - which hamper political will, leadership and decision-making.

Diplomacy and leadership

- Shifts in global power balance how regional powers relate to each other.
- The need for US/UK leadership in the global arena.
- The US/UK role in international affairs & ability to effect positive change.
- Future US/UK military engagement and collective security alliances.

WHICH DO YOU TEND TO THINK MORE ABOUT: **DISCRETE POLICY CHALLENGES OR** THE LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PICTURE-AND WHY?

Respondents were split relatively evenly on this question. However, their initial answers imply that, day-to-day at least, they would tend to think more in the immediate-term.

A number of respondents said this was issue dependent. Some were specifically interested in how issues interconnect (e.g. how energy impacts climate and how that influences extremism); others were not thinking about interconnections at all.

A majority of respondents agreed that you need to think in both the long and short term together in order to be effective.

One theme that did emerge was a sense that idealism was much stronger as a student or at high school, rather than when working day-to-day on policy issues. High school allowed you to think more openly - but it was hard to see how to actually achieve those big-picture goals, and the transition into the policy world required you to start breaking things down into short-term goals.

In some cases, this was at the expense of strategic ambition. This breaking down of ideals into "realism" started at university.



- When asked why they cared about the issues on their minds, respondents tended towards personal experience: they had worked in the field, had lived in the countries, were personally affected, or knew someone who was personally affected by a particular issue. Friends and family, personal opinion blogs and news sources all played influential roles. The narrative and personal connection were important.
- They were heavily influenced by academic learning from early childhood education through to academic research and particular professors at university. Some were also interested in issues that presented an intellectual or analytical challenge, or which piqued their curiosity through their complexity.
- Many respondents stressed the importance of early childhood messaging: the concepts had matured, but the shaping of values and beliefs started in childhood.

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- In some cases, their interest in specific issues was the result of an opportunistic virtuous cycle the chance to get engaged (e.g. on a university research project) had come up, and working on the issues had increased or cemented their interest.
- The "shock-factor" an issue which elicited an emotional gut reaction or fear, which inspired concern for other human beings and their wellbeing, or which appealed to their sense of right or wrong was more likely to drive many respondents to engage. For some,

- it was a sense of civic duty and appealing to their morals and values that drove them to deeper engagement.
- Respondents also acknowledged that they could be influenced to take an interest in an issue by the level of their home country's involvement, repetition of an issue in the media and marketing campaigns. They looked at interconnected issues, and were specifically influenced by the harm calculus: how many people are being harmed by a particular policy or decision.

When asked which individuals or types of public figures influenced them most, common responses were:

High profile former government officials, retired statesmen

Writers and analysts (e.g. Fareed Zakaria)

Policymakers in international organizations (as distinct from domestic government officials, who many felt would inform but not influence their opinions)

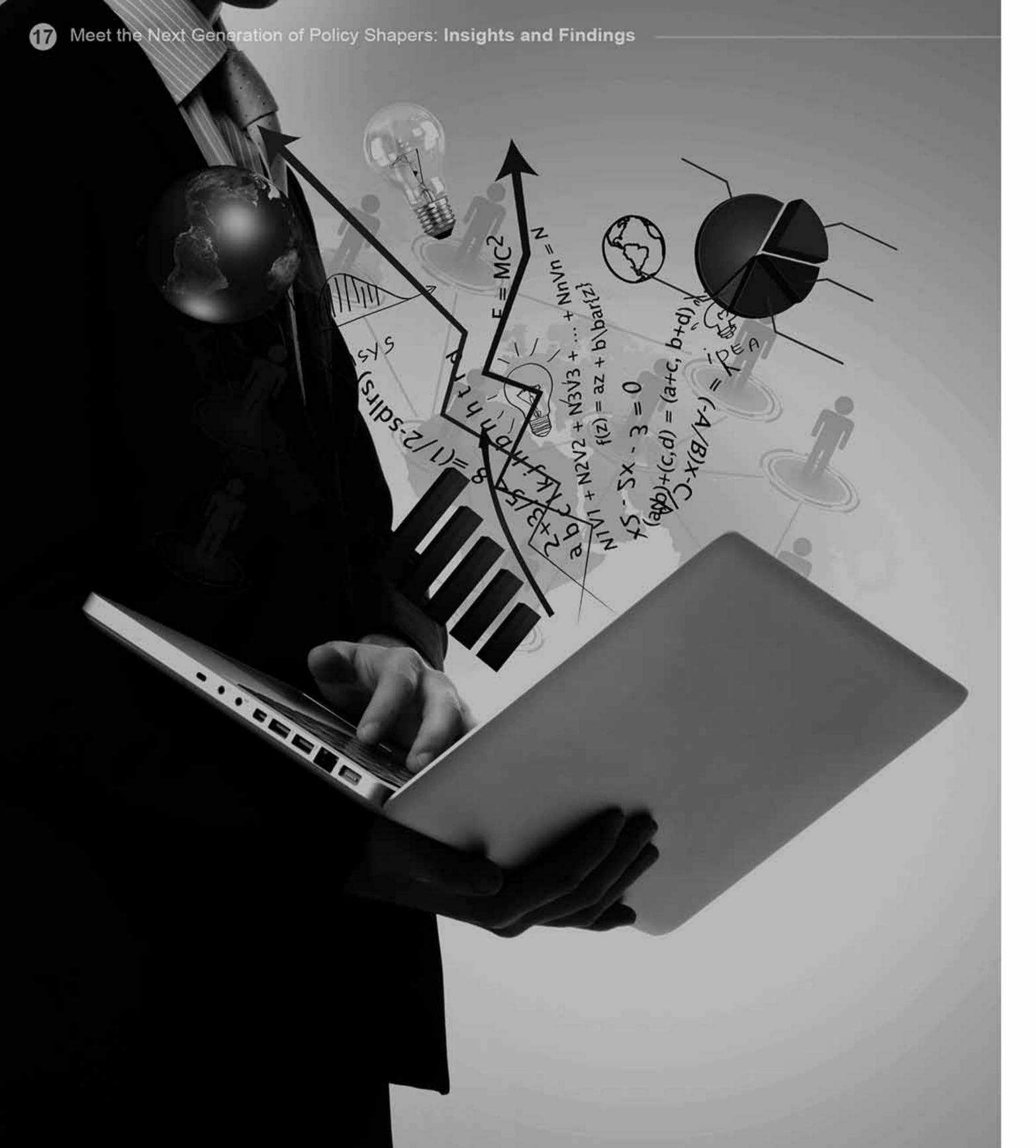
Policy experts who were unbiased, not ideologically driven, and had excelled in their field / had significant field experience (e.g. Jeffrey Sachs, Samantha Power, Paul Farmer);

Religious leaders (e.g. the Pope)

Leaders from the scientific, math or economics community

Authority figures in the political realm

Business people (because of their "real world" take on challenges) Academics



- Many said they were turned off by overt activism or advocacy, which they felt to be biased or only representative of one side of an argument.
- Celebrities from the entertainment industry were emphatically not influential in respondents' thinking on world issues. While there was recognition of their role in increasing public awareness, they were not respected as thought leaders (unless they had specific expertise). The exceptions to this were celebrities who bridged the policy, news and entertainment sectors specifically,
- the Daily Show / Jon Stewart and John Oliver, who were widely viewed as influential in informing and shaping respondents' opinions.
- In order to take an interest, respondents looked for issues that were compelling and felt like a two-way process: that is, interactive rather than a one-way dictation of information. They were more likely to take an interest if the issue had potential for an immediate impact on life, or if they had a personal stake. Context, history and connections to other issues were all important – although the background should not be so complex that it required excessive time to understand.

The most common modes of influence were social media (especially Twitter trends), media, TV, radio, respected magazines /institutions, & movies.

News sites

NYT, CNN, BBC, WSJ, FT, Reuters, Guardian, Independent, Bloomberg, Huffington Post, Washington Post. Needed to be seen as unbiased.

News aggregators

Real Clear World, Real Clear Politics, Flipboard, Feedly

Radio

BBC World Service, BBC Radio 4, PBS

Social media

Twitter (following newspapers, politicians, NGOs), Facebook news feed and discussions and groups, Reddit, YouTube, podcasts

Independent online magazine / news sites Vice News, Quartz, Project Syndicate

Personal connections
Quaker groups

Podcasts

NPR, BBC, Consumer Tech, Slate

Independent bloggers and video bloggers Andrew Sullivan's Daily Dish, John

Think tank and NGO information / reports
Carnegie, Belfer

Oliver, Wonk Blog

Carnegie, Belfer Center, IGC publications, CFR bulletins

News sources from other countries Daily Star Lebanon,

Al Jazeera, Le Monde, Agence France Presse, Russian news sources

Established magazines / analytical publications

Foreign Policy,
Foreign Affairs,
Economist
(Espresso), Atlantic,
New Yorker, Slate,
World Politics
Review

Google

Google alerts, Google News, Google Scholar

Issue-specific publications

Information
Dissemination,
Morning Defense,
EurActiv,
EuroZen

TV

Daily Show, John Oliver

Political publications Politico

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN THESE INFORMATION SOURCES?

CONVENIENCE

- Ease of access
- Short, distilled
- One stop shop
- Barometer for people's opinions

RELEVANCE

- Always up to date
- Breaking news
- Compelling stories
- Connections between issues

Most commonly read sources were personal texts, emails, Facebook and Twitter, followed by aggregator news sites and individual news sites. Longer articles and online magazines were read at home in free time. Both long and short articles were seen as relevant and necessary.

IMPARTIALITY

- Provides range of views but allows reader to form their own opinion
- Unbiased
- Multiple source policies
- Provides alternative perspectives

INFORMATIVE

- Combines overviews & deep dives
- Connects issues together
- Helps with basic understanding
- Personality of writer



66 WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO MOVE **FROM HAVING AN INTEREST TO TAKING**

Participants responses were largely focused on a sense of injustice and frustration.

Also critical was the ability to have a personal impact.

- Specifically, respondents said they would take action if:
- they felt reality did not reflect what they wanted the world to look like;
- a sense of **injustice**sparked deep anger for an issue or cause;
- they were emotionally moved by the humanity, morality or ethics of an issue;

- there was a prevalence
 of misinformation about
 an issue, and they felt a
 need to correct it;
- they had a personal connection to the issue, or it was relatable, relevant and they were able to personally associate with it;
- there was a persuasive spokesperson (students were also heavily influenced by class presentations, term papers, academics, and well-presented articles);
- there was a sense of imminent threat developing;

66 WHAT INGREDIENTS NECESSARYTO ACTION?

CONVENIENCE

The issue is easy to get involved (location, time, commitment, etc)

CLEAR GOAL

Being clear about why people should get involved was key.

This was critical. Respondents needed to feel they could actually make a change, to feel there might be a positive ripple effect from their direct action.

Participants needed to feel part of a community of their peers

Participants suggested it was better to provide a positive solution within existing systems, instead of campaigning against an issue.

SPECIFICITY

ACTION

Participants were less likely to take action if the campaign was vague

WHAT DOES "ACTION" LOOK LIKE?

When asked to determine what "action" looked like in practice, respondents identified a fairly wide range of examples – but simultaneously conveyed a sense of uncertainty and limitation about the actions they felt empowered to take.

- Potential actions identified were:

 "Articulate and amplify": writing articles, op-eds and blogs. Talking to friends, spreading messages through social media, espousing ideas in professional conversations. Being informed and persuasive, researching, advocating, speaking up and building relationships.
- Learn more: be informed and understand all sides, not just one bias. Start by informing yourself then others.
- Build awareness: not only through social media, but through movies, posters and art, and by sharing information and op-eds with friends.
- Sustain interest: sharing or posting something on Facebook isn't enough, e.g. the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

- raised money, but it is unclear how many people understood what it was actually about. Awareness is important too.
- Political action: vote, lobby, sign petitions or wear badges to show support for an issue. Participate in demonstrations, email policy-makers and members of congress or make monetary donations to campaigns.
- Personal commitment: study an issue, dedicate your career to it, become a government advisor, draft policies.

 The need to identify clear actions and articulate what impact their contribution would have was seen by many respondents as a key determinant in whether they would get actively involved in an issue or not.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION DO YOU SHARE?

When asked about sharing links, respondents who did so were more likely to if the articles were well-structured and easy to read (e.g. "5 reasons..." or Buzzfeed style); if a video was short (no longer than two minutes); if the link was giving new information or would influence others; if it was controversial or if it included a high profile individual. Some said they would share links about nuclear weapons if it involved a new dimension about the debate, or if it were a headline comparing states' approaches or exploring negotiations, rather than dry facts about how much a country spent on its weapons.

A number of respondents suggested that they were more likely to share good news or positive stories, or on issues where there was already interest among a group of peers, or a humanitarian angle.

While many young people look to Facebook rather than traditional new sources for their information, the broad view was that "clicktivism" was helpful only in raising awareness on a superficial level; it could not replace traditional activism in delivering deep change. There was also a risk of "over-sharing", which would cause a message to lose its meaning.



AWARENESS

With the exception of those actively studying nuclear policy, respondents for the most part reported that nuclear weapons did not feature on their radar with any regularity. Interest increased when nuclear issues featured in the news, or when they arose in an academic context.

Respondents put this down to a number of things:

Nuclear weapons are not relatable

The current generation has not experienced widespread warfare. As a result they are less concerned about the need for nuclear weapons, and the debate in general. They do not understand how devastating an attack could be. And, because people don't talk about them, they have in turn become an issue that is out of sight, out of mind.

The old landmine in the garden

Nuclear weapons are seen as vestiges of the Cold War era. Most people have forgotten that we even have them, and there is no sense of "impending doom". To quote one participant:

"Nuclear weapons are like an old landmine in the garden. Over time, people forget it's there. Then one day someone is going to step on it"

The face of warfare has changed

concerns are no longer about nuclear crisis, but about the national grid being hacked (for example).





AWARENESS

They are intangible

because it wasn't possible to visit nuclear sites and see the actual weapons, they were distant for most people. It was hard to contemplate the impact these weapons could have.

Disempowerment

"Because nuclear weapons are a national security issue, no one will listen to me unless I'm an activist". Trust in governments and politicians is low.

Risk assessment

the possibility of these weapons being used seems distant. It seems unlikely that a nuclear crisis will actually happen.

Where respondents did think about nuclear policy it was in the context of:

Unpredictability

nuclear terrorism, loose nuclear materials, unsecured sites, non-state actors gaining access to materials, and the risk of irrational actors.

The actions of other nuclear players

North Korea (not just their possession of nuclear weapons, but also the follow on effects), Pakistan, Israel, Russia and China. Nuclear weapons are an unnecessary platform for nationalism.

Proliferation

(specifically, Iran) and our lack of confidence in our ability to monitor what is really happening, and control who has access to materials.

Links with other weapons

how nuclear weapons may be used as a model for other chemical and biological weapon policies.

Interrelated impacts

nuclear weapons impact our relationships with other states and inform every aspect of our policy-making. There is a geopolitical cost.

They compound the imbalance within the UN Security Council and take the spotlight off other issues, such as human rights in North Korea.

Deterrence theory

specifically, the US relationship with Russia, and the India / Pakistan relationship.

Energy

nuclear weapons and nuclear energy are unfortunately often conflated.

False sense of security

with other countries and in our intelligence.



MEMORIES

Respondents' earliest memories of nuclear weapons were centered around:

Media

- Documentaries: the history channel, World War II;
- Other television and movies: cartoons ("When the Wind Blows"), TV series ("The Day After") movies ("Pearl Harbor", "Independence Day" and "Terminator"), related movies (about landmines – at an early age, which instilled a fear of weapons).
- Video games ("Civilization").

When asked whether they believed media portrayal of nuclear weapons had desensitized them, some respondents highlighted two interesting points.

- the fact that movies always end with the hero saving the day may be desensitizing.
- nuclear weapons are often shown as a force for good against a threat.

Academic learning

Primary / grade school history classes: particularly WWII.

Personal experience

- Visiting a nuclear bunker in Essex / a museum in Arizona.
- Participating in a nuclear shelter drill, duck and cover exercises, protect and survive campaign.
- Father worked in missile testing; professor's father on the team that developed the first atomic bomb.
- Talked to a "Hibakusha" survivor on Skype.

Campaigns

- Bertrand Russell quote
- "Radical" protests

Images / historical references

- Images: mushroom clouds, bombs exploding.
- The Manhattan project and towns in the southwest where nuclear testing was carried out.
- Japan: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the paper crane story, Enola Gay footage.
- 9/11: the line of thinking among some that we should "nuke them" – although it wasn't clear who and why.

WHATWORDS / PHRASES DO YOU ASSOCIATE WEAPONS?

COGNITIVE CONNECTIONS

IMPACTS

- Radioactive, radiation
- Vaporization
- Cancer
- Destruction / mass destruction
- Death
- Mushroom cloud
- Tragedy
- Genetic mutation
- Armageddon
- Tragedy
- Annihilation
- Deep family pain
- Sum of all fears
- Injustice for innocent people
- Radiation from Chernobyl

IN THE NEWS

- Iran
- North Korea
- Russia
- Proliferation
- Terrorism

POSITIVE FORCES

- Peace
- Stability

HISTORIC REFERENCES

- World War II
- Cuban missile crisis
- Hiroshima / Nagasaki
- Cold War
- Manhattan project
- Fat man / Little Boy

STRATEGIC IMPACTS

- Deterrence
- Global Zero
- Negotiation
- Arms race
- Security
- P5
- Geopolitics
- Red line

EMOTION

- Delusion of security
- Pointless / irrelevant
- Unsolved problem
- Craziness
- Masculine bravado
- They still exist for some reason
- Non-issue

IMAGINATION / IMAGERY

- Dr. Strangelove
- Feels like fiction
- Black and white images
- Zombies
- Drama tool
- A big red button
- Peter Sellers

CONNECTED ISSUES

Climate change

DO NUCLEAR WEAPONS MAKE YOU FEEL SAFE?

We did not take a strict poll on the numbers of respondents who answered one way or another – in part because many answered both yes and no to this question, and in part because many felt indifferent.

Those who did feel safe with the existence of nuclear weapons said they did because.

- They believe nuclear weapons have a stabilizing effect with US allies, maintain the balance of power, and serve as a deterrent, making the world less prone to "accidental attack".
- The fact that their home country (the US or UK) possesses nuclear weapons, has first strike capability, and is geographically removed from other nuclear powers, makes them feel more secure.
- They believe we are now in the most peaceful time in history, and the world went through a paradigm shift with the advent

- of nuclear weapons, which now protect us from engaging elsewhere (provided they don't proliferate).
- They believe mutually assured destruction makes it unlikely that others will take actions that risk their own safety and livelihood.
- They see safeguards as effective: the likelihood of non-state or irrational actors getting hold of nuclear material is low.
- They believe that during the Cold War, there was no real consideration of a nuclear war.

- They believe that if the US and Russia did not have nuclear weapons they would have gone to war over Ukraine. And if Ukraine had retained their nuclear weapons, they wouldn't have been attacked by Russia.
- They see them as a way of maintaining the status quo.
- They see them as a way of demonstrating that a country is well funded and capable, and as a symbol of international prestige and status.

DO NUCLEAR WEAPONS MAKE YOU FEEL SAFE?

Some participants expressed belief in deterrence, but said that it only held true if all actors were rational. Others said that nuclear weapons didn't make them feel safe, but in a world where they did exist, they were glad to be in a country that had them.

Those who did not feel safe with nuclear weapons said this was because

- They think that if we have them, others can too, and anyone can attack first.
- They believe nuclear weapons do not address day-to-day individual concerns or security needs.
- They are concerned about inherent instability within the system: the risk of human error, corruption, poor judgment, bureaucratic incompetence

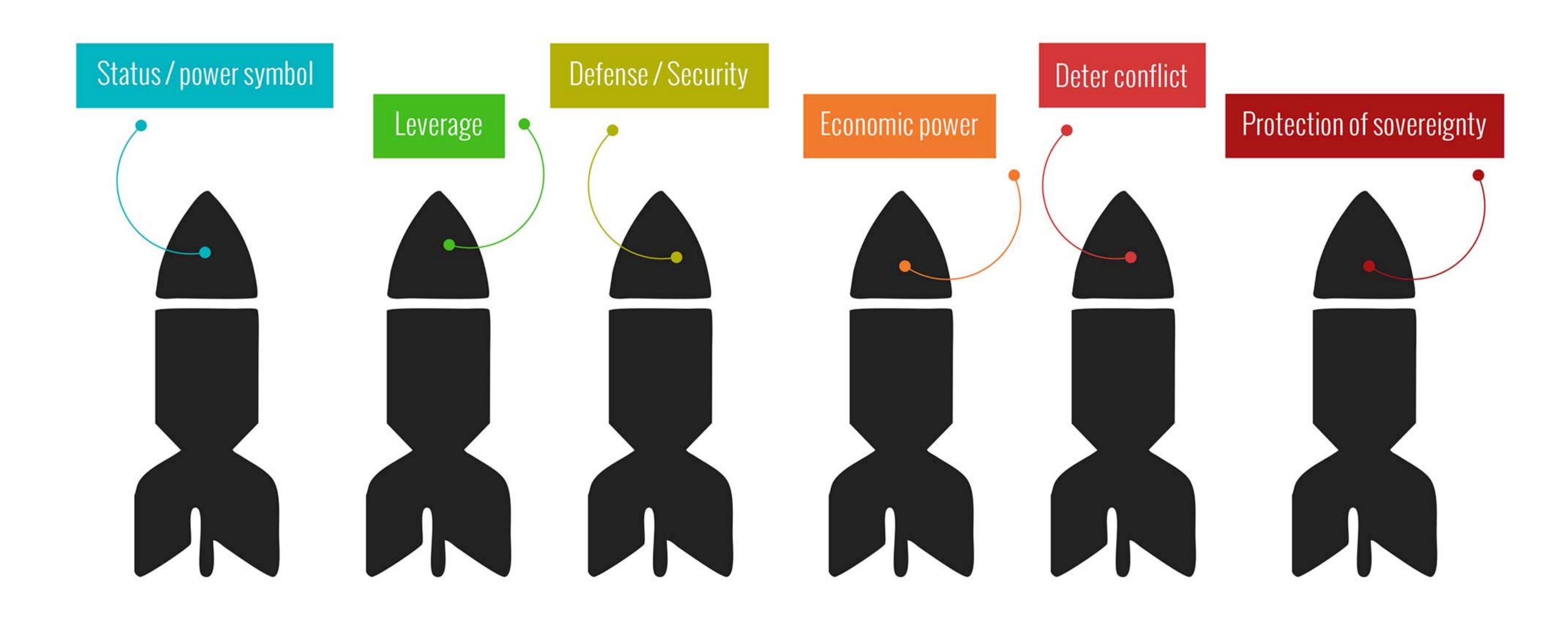
- or incorrect intelligence.
- They believe that deterrence may work between states, but the actors have changed. Nuclear terrorism is a real threat, and the nuclear debate is no longer just about deterrence.
- They believe that the possibility of using nuclear weapons as a last resort gives no guarantee that

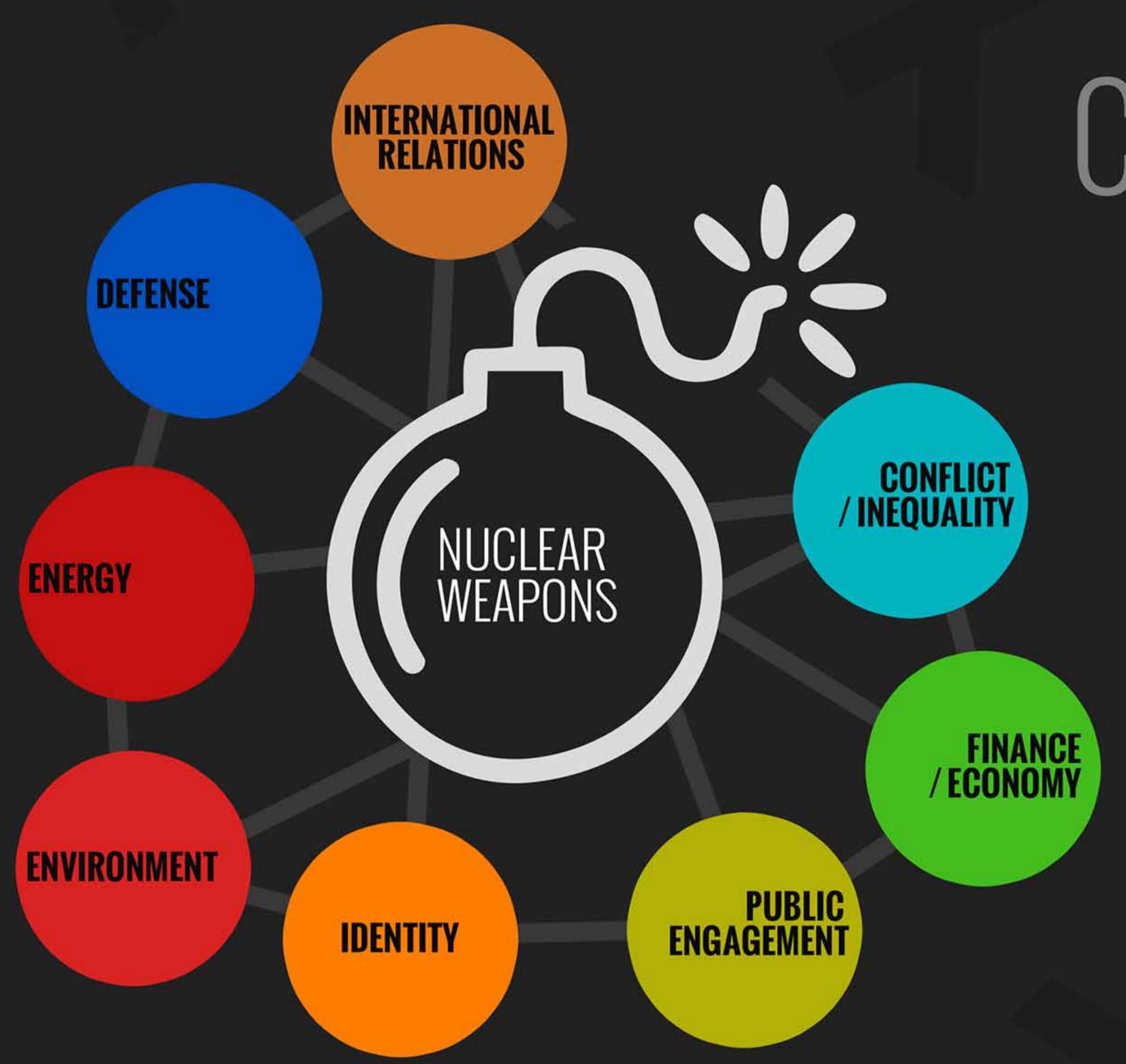
- the level of military or human engagement will be kept to a smaller scale.
- They do not believe we can enforce who has nuclear weapons, or who has access to nuclear materials.
- They see nuclear weapons as indiscriminate and they fear the impact that uncontrollable circumstances could have.

3

When asked about the role of nuclear weapons, respondents focused on







CONNECTIONS



Some viewed nuclear weapons as entirely distinct from other global issues, but others identified the following overlaps with other policy agendas

Making Connections - How Are The Following Issues Related to Nuclear Weapons?



International relations:

Nuclear weapons affect diplomacy: they impact our ability to build productive, constructive international relationships, and they block other issues from being addressed. Their role in international power politics - particularly the connection between nuclear weapons and the P5 – make them a dangerous policy tool. They are a defining force in our relations with North Korea, China and Russia.



Conflict / inequality

Nuclear weapons are a root cause of conflict and inequality, and yet we keep hold of them "just in case". They exist on an agenda of fear and separation. The existence of nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan has allowed them to continue a low intensity, long term conflict that is bleeding each other dry because they believe nuclear weapons will keep the conflict from escalating. Similar problems exist with Russia and the Middle East. In the Middle East, the competition for hegemony and pursuit of nuclear weapons is a dangerous path.



Finance / Economy

Nuclear weapons are expensive, and divert funds from other essential issues. Meanwhile, getting rid of them could increase international trust and help to bolster international markets. On a day-to-day level, people only buy things if they feel secure, and individual salaries could be affected by nuclear disaster.



Public engagement

Information is often presented to the public in a highly politicized way. This makes it hard for voters to develop informed opinions on complex issues.





Identity

We may have the debate about whether nuclear weapons are morally acceptable or not. However, the decision to disarm will not be down to the individual leader of a country – s/he would still have to convince others. The military industrial complex is a strong influencer, and there is a stark division between those inside and outside the security establishment on nuclear weapons.



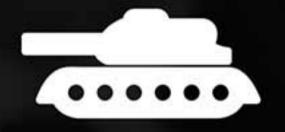
Environment

Nuclear disaster would lead to land loss, crop failure, contamination and food security issues. Radiation would spread to soil and the ocean causing environmental degradation.



Energy

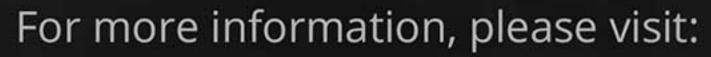
The nuclear weapons debate has subsumed discussion about nuclear energy. It also plays into discussions around oil resources in the Middle East.



Defense

No enforcement mechanism exists to get rid of all security threats. Nuclear weapons are the ultimate form of deterrence, based on fear. But deterrence leads to mistrust between states. Meanwhile, non-state actors are continuing to emerge as a security threat – which will worsen if they obtain nuclear material.





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