Does Social Science Inform Foreign Policy? Evidence from a Survey of US National Security, Trade, and Development Officials

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Scholars continue to debate the relationship of academic international relations to policy. One of the most straightforward ways to discern whether policymakers find IR scholarship relevant to their work is to ask them. We analyzed an elite survey of US policy practitioners to better understand the conditions under which practitioners use academic knowledge in their work. We surveyed officials across three different policy areas: international development, national security, and trade. We also employed multiple survey experiments in an effort to causally identify the impact of academic consensus on the views of policy officials and to estimate the relative utility of different kinds of research outputs. We found that policymakers frequently engage with academic ideas, find an array of research outputs and approaches useful, and that scholarly findings can shift their views. Key obstacles to using academic knowledge include practitioners' lack of time as well as academic work being too abstract and not timely, but not that it is overly quantitative. Additionally, we documented important differences between national security officials and their counterparts who work in the areas of development and trade. We suggest that this variation is rooted in the nature of the different policy areas.

Los expertos continúan con el debate acerca del vínculo entre los estudios académicos sobre relaciones internacionales y la política. Una de las formas más sencillas de determinar si los responsables de formular políticas consideran que los estudios de RI son relevantes para su trabajo es preguntándoles. Analizamos una encuesta de élite realizada a profesionales de la política en EE. UU. para comprender mejor las condiciones en las que utilizan los conocimientos académicos en su trabajo. Encuestamos a funcionarios de tres áreas políticas diferentes: Desarrollo Internacional, Seguridad Nacional y Comercio. También realizamos varios experimentos de encuestas para identificar la influencia del consenso académico en las opiniones de los funcionarios políticos y estimar la utilidad relativa de los distintos tipos de resultados de investigación. Comprobamos que, con frecuencia, los responsables de formular políticas se comprometen con las ideas académicas, consideran de utilidad toda una serie de resultados y enfoques de investigación, y que los hallazgos académicos pueden cambiar sus puntos de vista. Entre los principales obstáculos a la hora de recurrir a los conocimientos académicos se encuentran la falta de tiempo de los profesionales, así como el hecho de que los trabajos académicos sean demasiado abstractos y poco oportunos, pero no el hecho de que sean excesivamente cuantitativos. Además, documentamos importantes diferencias entre los funcionarios de Seguridad Nacional y sus colegas que trabajan en las áreas de Desarrollo y Comercio. Sugerimos que esta variación tiene su origen en la naturaleza de los diferentes ámbitos políticos.

Des chercheurs continuent à débattre du rapport entre relations internationales académiques et politique. L'une des manières les plus directes de discerner si les décideurs politiques trouvent les recherches en relations internationales pertinentes pour leur travail consiste à leur demander. Nous analysons une enquête sur l'élite des intervenants politiques américains pour mieux comprendre les conditions dans lesquelles ces derniers ont recours à des connaissances académiques dans leur travail. Nous avons enquêté sur des officiels se chargeant de trois domaines politiques différents : le développement international,

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la sécurité nationale et le commerce. Nous avons employé plusieurs expériences d'enquête dans un effort pour identifier causalement l'impact du consensus académique sur les points de vue des officiels politiques et pour estimer l'utilité relative des différents types de résultats de recherches. Nous constatons que les décideurs politiques impliquent fréquemment des idées académiques, qu'ils trouvent tout un ensemble d'approches et de résultats de recherches utiles, et qu'ils peuvent changer de points de vue en fonction de conclusions de recherches. Les principaux obstacles au recours aux connaissances académiques sont le manque de temps des intervenants politiques ainsi que le fait que certains travaux académiques sont trop abstraits et ne sont pas opportuns, mais pas qu'ils sont trop quantitatifs. De plus, nous documentons d'importantes différences entre les officiels chargés de la sécurité nationale et leurs homologues travaillant dans les secteurs du développement et du commerce. Nous suggérons que cette variation est enracinée dans la nature des différents domaines politiques.

Current and former policy officials, scholars, and pundits frequently lament that contemporary international relations (IR) scholarship is irrelevant to those charged with crafting and executing foreign policy, suggesting a sizable gap between what policy practitioners want and what scholars produce. In 2015, Kathleen Hicks—current US Deputy Secretary of Defense—concluded that "the academic and policy worlds are too disconnected today" (Hicks 2015). Influential journalists—including *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof (2014); then editor of *Foreign Policy,* David Rothkopf (2014); and Pulitzer prize-winning foreign policy journalist, Tom Ricks—have attacked the "extraordinary irrelevance of political science" (Ricks 2014). A chorus of IR scholars agree that political science and IR scholarship is too inwardly focused, abstract, and quantitative, and/or it is not easily digestible by practitioners (e.g., Wallace 1996; George 1997; Walt 1999; Jentleson 2002; Mahnken 2010; Mead 2010; Hurrell 2011; Kurki 2011; Mearsheimer and Walt 2013; Avey and Desch 2014; Oren 2015; Turton 2015; Desch 2015, 2019; Weaver 2017). For their part, policy officials lack the time or interest to adequately engage academic work (e.g., Siverson 2000; Barnett 2006; Goldman 2006; Jentleson and Ratner 2011; Seaver 2016; Radelet 2020).[1]

Others note, however, that while an academic-policy gap has been apparent in the past, political science (and especially the subfield of IR) has made significant strides toward increased engagement in recent years. Henry Farrell and Jack Knight (2019) argue that political science is better able than it once was to communicate with the policy community "thanks in part to projects such as Bridging the Gap, which helps train scholars in how to find audiences for their work."[2] Many also point to the dramatic growth in publications by academics in policy outlets such as *Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, Monkey Cage, The Conversation, Lawfare,* and *War on the Rocks,* among others that facilitate scholarly engagement with the public and practitioners (e.g., Sides 2011; Nyhan, Sides, and Tucker 2015; Maliniak et al. 2020). Writing in 2016, Marc Lynch (2016b) noted, "The Monkey Cage alone has published more than 8,000 articles featuring nearly 1,500 political scientists. Every day, hundreds of academics discuss their research or current events on group and personal blogs, think tank websites, magazines or major media sites." In short, where Desch (2019) and Van Evera (2010) see a "cult of the irrelevant" in IR, Lynch (2016a) sees "a golden age of academic engagement" and a "relevance revolution."[3]

One straightforward way to assess practitioners' views on scholarship is to ask them directly. In an earlier effort to do just that, Paul Avey and Michael Desch (2014) asked current and former US national security officials in 2011 when and how they use social science in their own work.[4] The authors found that policymakers follow social science literature, but "they are skeptical of much academic social science which they see as jargon-ridden and overly focused on technique, at the expense of substantive findings" (Avey and Desch 2014, 228). Security practitioners also confirmed that they lacked sufficient time to consume academic research in its traditional formats. Avey and Desch (2014, 228) concluded, "[T]he short answer to our question is that what the academy is giving policymakers is not what they say they need from us." As noted above, however, IR scholars in the last decade have devoted considerable attention to meeting practitioner concerns by offering analyses in the format and on the timelines that Avey and Desch's data suggest policymakers are likely to find useful. To what extent have these efforts succeeded, or are scholars missing the mark? Have policymakers taken advantage of this new "golden age" of academic engagement? How do conclusions about the gap change if we look beyond the issue area of national security?

In this article, we report the results of a new survey of senior US foreign policy practitioners conducted in late 2017 and early 2018. Our survey included behavioral and attitudinal questions about whether, when, and how respondents view academics and use research in their work for the US government. We reproduce key aspects of Avey and Desch's original survey questions and methodology, allowing us to observe whether there has been change over time in how national security policymakers use and view academic ideas and methods. At the same time, this survey differs from Avey and Desch (2014) in four important ways that allow us to more accurately characterize how policy practitioners across the US foreign policy apparatus view IR scholarship.

First, we diversified the sample to include not just national security policy officials but also those officials working on international trade and international development policy. Expanding the sample in this way is important because, as Maliniak et al. (2020) show, there is significant variation across issues in the extent to which scholars produce policy-relevant work, engage with practitioners, or influence policy. The focus on security in the 2011 survey (and most of the literature on the relationship between the academic and policy communities of IR) may skew our understanding of the IR academic-policy relationship. Surveying policymakers in the trade, development, and security areas allows us to learn and compare what practitioners want from scholars across different issue areas.

Second, we included more and lower-ranking policy officials in the executive branch of the US government. This addresses the possibility that lower-level officials engage with academic research more frequently and are more familiar

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[1] We focus here on efforts to diagnose and bridge the gap between scholars and policy practitioners, but we note that many view gaps between the two communities as necessary or useful. See, for example, Zambernardi (2016); Jahn (2017); Sterling-Folker (2017); and the discussion in Parks and Stern (2014, 77–8).

[2] See also Andrews et al. (2015).

[3] See also Herrera and Post (2019) and Hendrix et al. (2020).

[4] See also Talbot and Talbot (2014).

with modern social science tools and knowledge than senior officials (Avey and Desch 2014, 241–43; Fazal 2016, 38–9; Feaver 2020, 179). This, along with the inclusion of multiple issue areas, also allowed us to more than double the number of officials surveyed.

Third, we embedded a series of experiments in this survey, which allowed us to provide some of the first causally identified answers to outstanding questions in the bridging the gap debate.[5] These include how responsive policy practitioners are to changes in social scientific consensus on key policy questions as well as if/how the identity of scholars and the format in which they choose to communicate their research to policymakers affect practitioners' estimates of the utility of that research. We found strong evidence that policy practitioners are responsive to scholarly consensus. There is less evidence, however, that practitioners systematically favor research produced by individuals with particular kinds of training or affiliations or that they prefer more supposedly consumable research outputs like policy memos, blogs, or think tank reports compared to academic peer-reviewed articles or books.

Fourth, we broadened the conception of engagement to include engagement on social media, blog posts for consumption by policy elites, and IR scholars' attempts to train future policymakers. Our data on these and related dimensions provide insights about the policymakers' receptivity to important ways in which IR scholars and social scientists try to narrow gaps with practitioners. The data also provide information on the normative views of policy elites about how scholars *should* seek to inform and affect policy debates.

Our findings suggest that the pessimistic conventional wisdom is not fully accurate. There remains a sizable gap between what policymakers want and what scholars provide, but it is not as large as has often been claimed, at least not in all issue areas of IR. Policy officials are broadly responsive to the views of academic experts and willing to engage with academic work. To a lesser extent, they also are receptive to various social scientific methods, including quantitative methods. At the same time, we find significant differences across the three areas. Security officials required greater consensus among IR experts to be convinced to alter their policy preferences. Similarly, security practitioners use social science ideas and data less frequently than their colleagues who work on trade and development, are less likely to think that academic work applies directly to specific components of their work, are less likely to value academic research, are less likely to find mathematical approaches useful, and are more likely to find area studies, ethnographic research, and historical approaches to be more helpful in their work. Notably, we find evidence of change between the 2011 and 2018 surveys with security practitioners in the later survey being somewhat more likely to value quantitative methods than they were in the past.

A central contribution of this paper is to measure the gap between the IR academic and policy worlds by asking policymakers about their use of social science theories, data, and methods. We also describe key differences between national security officials and those working in trade and development. Although our main goal in that portion of the paper is descriptive, we also explore the reasons for this variation. We suggest that differences across issue areas result from differences in the problem sets faced by each group of policymakers.

The article proceeds in four sections. First, we describe the methodology of our survey. Second, we present our results in three parts: (1) an analysis of two experiments that explore whether officials are willing to update their policy views based on the degree of academic consensus; (2) an analysis of survey questions and a third experiment that probe practitioners' willingness to engage academic arguments in their own work for the US government; and (3) an analysis of survey questions about the usefulness of various social science methods to their work. In this discussion of our results, we highlight significant differences across the three issue areas—security, trade, and development. Third, we explore the likely sources of the persistent differences between security officials and those in development and trade. The conclusion summarizes our findings, evaluates their implications for existing arguments about the theory–practice divide, and makes recommendations for scholars seeking to study that divide and/or produce more policy-relevant, academic research.

Research Design

We used the Federal Yellow Book to identify individuals employed in one of several dozen offices or agencies with responsibility for creating and/or implementing US trade, national security, or policy development during the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. We included officials at the level of "assistant/deputy director" (or equivalent) and above in several offices.[6] We mailed or emailed a recruitment letter, signed by a prominent former US government official (former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, for the security subsample and former President of the World Bank and former US Trade Representative, Robert Zoellick, for development and trade) to all individuals for whom we secured contact information. The survey was fielded between November 20, 2017 and January 24, 2018 (hereafter 2018).

We received responses from 616 individuals or 17.6 percent of our sample. The response rate was 23.4 percent for security officials, 14.5 percent for trade officials, and 14.8 percent for development officials. We do not have detailed demographic information or professional histories for our nonrespondents so we are not able to study whether our respondents differ systematically from our nonrespondents. And while we have no reason to believe that our respondent sample is biased, it is possible that those who replied to an academic survey—even when solicited by a former high ranking official—may be more predisposed to academic work. Thus, our results may represent an upper bound in practitioners' willingness to engage scholarship.

By including respondents at lower levels of government, moving beyond the security issue area, and adding officials in the Obama administration, we aimed to survey a broader range of respondents than Avey and Desch (2014). Our respondent pool included practitioners in three areas, although it remained weighted toward national security officials; 57.3 percent of all respondents worked in the security and defense area, compared to 21.8 percent in trade and 20.9 percent in development. The median and mean age of respondents was 60, and the overwhelming majority were white (90.4 percent, about the same as in the 2011 survey) and male (75 percent, compared with 85 percent in 2011). More than 90 percent held an advanced degree, compared to 85 percent in Avey and Desch's (2014) original study. On average, respondents had served in government for 21.2 years. This is down slightly from the

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[5]On elite experiments in IR, see Dietrich, Hardt, and Swedlund (2021).

[6]See Appendix A for a list of offices and policymaker positions included in the survey.

previous study (24 years), although 40.2 percent of respondents in 2018 had served for more than 25 years.

The greatest sources of diversity among respondents, and the largest changes since the 2011 survey, were in organizational rank, type of job responsibility, and educational training. As in 2011, the largest proportion in 2018 (28.7 percent) described their highest rank held in the US government as Senate confirmable policy or department agency/leader, but this percent was down substantially from 44 percent in the earlier study. Similarly, 37.8 percent reported that their primary job responsibilities were policy decision making, 30.2 percent said management, 8.3 percent said policy implementation, and 15.3 percent said policy analysis in 2018. The categories were slightly different from 2011, which complicates comparisons; but in 2011, they were roughly 59, 15, 13, and 4 percent, respectively.[7] Finally, educational background was the largest source of diversity in 2011, and respondents in the 2018 survey were even more widely distributed across fields than they had been in 2011. The largest group of respondents in the most recent survey identified their primary disciplinary background as international affairs (28.8 percent), followed by law (14.9 percent), economics (13.2 percent), political science (9.7 percent), and public policy (7.3 percent).

There were notable demographic differences across the three subfields. Respondents who work in the national security area were more likely to be male and less socially liberal, while those in the trade issue area were more educated than those in development or security. Development officials were more economically liberal compared to security and trade, were less likely than their colleagues in security and trade to describe their primary job responsibilities as decision making, and were more likely than their counterparts in security and trade to say that their primary task is management. See Appendix B for full demographic summary.

In addition to the demographic questions described above, we asked respondents whether and how social science research is useful to their work, the academic and other sources of information they use in their work, and their opinion on a range of foreign policy issues. We report data on the first two types of questions in this article.

Results

Our survey was designed to assess whether, when, and how practitioners use academic research in their policy work for the US government. We sought to establish whether and to what extent practitioners listened and responded to IR scholars on policy issues, engaged with the arguments and evidence in social scientific research, and embraced various social science research methods. The answer to all three questions was yes, although more cautiously so on the third. More importantly, we found significant differences across the three subfields on these questions. Security policymakers use social science research less frequently than do their colleagues in trade and development and are less likely than trade and development officials to say that academic research applies directly to their work. In short, policymakers value academic research more than the conventional wisdom suggests, but security officials differ from their colleagues in other fields about the utility of academic research. The conventional wisdom is partially correct, in

other words, and it more accurately reflects the views of security officials than those of practitioners in other areas of US foreign policy.

Do Foreign Policymakers Listen to IR Scholars?

To study whether and to what extent security, trade, and development practitioners respond to arguments made by IR scholars, we included two survey experiments. These represent, to our knowledge, the first causally identified evidence that policy practitioners will update their views in response to information about the views of IR scholars.

Effect of Consensus on Hypothetical Policy

The first experiment assessed whether policy practitioners were responsive to scholarly and expert opinion. We asked respondents to reflect on how their opinion might change if they were confronted with information about varying levels of support for a particular policy among individuals with significant IR expertise. Additionally, we varied whether we labeled the group as "experts" or "scholars." We thus randomized both the level of consensus around expected benefits to the United States of the policy in question and the label that we applied to the experts. The former allowed us to test responsiveness to increasing consensus, while the latter allowed us to investigate whether the labels used to characterize groups of individuals with IR expertise conditions the level of responsiveness among policymakers as consensus increases. On this latter point, we were interested, in particular, in whether linking the group to the academy by referring to "scholars" rather than "experts" would make respondents less responsive to the same treatments.

The precise wording of the experiment, with the randomized features in brackets, was: "If you learned that [**52/74/94**] percent of international relations [**experts/scholars**] have concluded that a particular policy would benefit the United States, would that fact make you more likely to support the policy, less likely to support the policy, or have no effect on your view?" Below, we refer to the 52 percent condition as the "low consensus" condition, the 74 percent condition as the "moderate" consensus condition, and the 94 percent condition as the "high consensus" condition.

Respondents could select one of the following options: "it would make me more likely to support the policy," "it would not influence my view," or "it would make me less likely to support the policy." To ease interpretation, we dichotomized this scale, giving "it would make me more likely to support the policy" a value of 100 and all other answers a value of 0.[8] We estimated treatment effects relative to the low consensus condition using linear probability models.[9]

Increasing the level of consensus had substantial effects, on average, on the willingness of policy practitioners to say that they would be more likely to support the policy, but varying the label we applied to our group of experts ("scholars" versus "experts") did not affect support. We focus most of our discussion on the level of consensus results.

Figure 1 plots the effect of increasing consensus among experts relative to the low consensus condition along with 95 percent confidence intervals. Averaging across respondents in all three issue areas, moving from the low consensus condition to the moderate consensus condition increased

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[7] 97 percent of respondents in the 2018 survey listed their primary or secondary responsibilities as policy analysis, policy decision making, or policy implementation. This adds confidence that our survey pool captured policy-oriented positions.

[8] Only one respondent in any condition selected the "less likely to support the policy" response option so results are essentially identical when we use the original three-point scale instead.

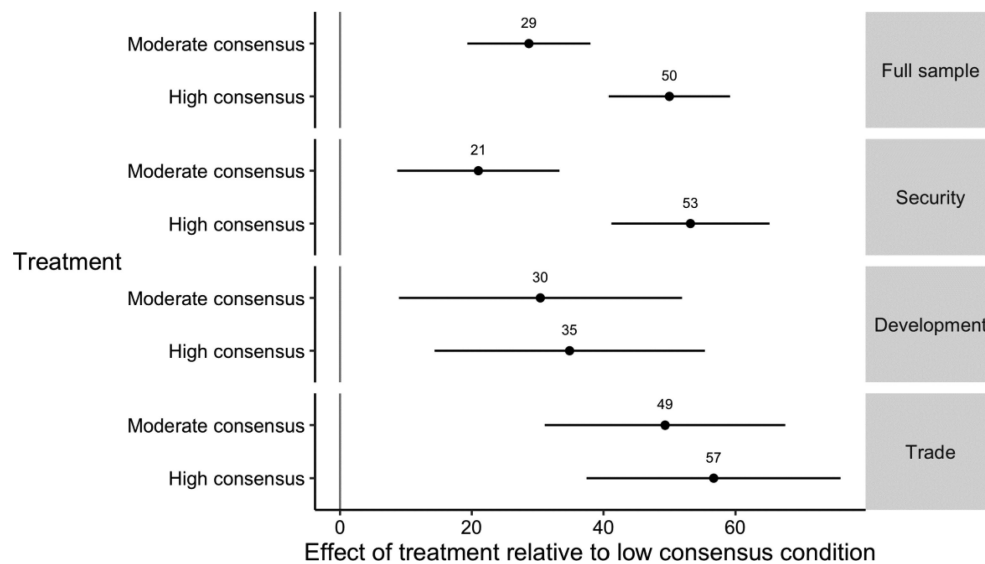[9] For full results, see Appendix C.

Figure 1. Effect of Scholarly Consensus on Policymaker Support.

the probability of respondents saying that they would likely support the policy by nearly 30 percent points. Moving from the low consensus condition to the high consensus condition increased the probability of respondents saying that they would likely support the policy by about 50 percent points. Splitting the sample by respondents' issue area, we see that the views in the security issue area (panel 2 in Figure 1) are quite elastic to changes in consensus among scholars; each increase in consensus results in a substantial increase in respondent expectations that they would support the policy. For security practitioners, moving from the low consensus condition to the moderate consensus condition increased the probability of support for the policy by only 21 percent points, compared with 30 percent points for development officials and 49 percent points for trade policymakers. Respondents in both trade and development were moved dramatically by treatment, but their responses were less conditional on the magnitude of the increase in consensus.

We caution readers not to make too much of these differences in treatment effect magnitude across subfields given the lack of precision in the development and trade subsamples. Instead, we suggest that readers focus on the *consistent* effect of increased consensus across issue areas. We take this as evidence that policy practitioners are willing, at least in this hypothetical setting, to respond to increased consensus among academic experts.

EFFECT OF CONSENSUS ON A MORE CONCRETE QUESTION OF FOREIGN POLICY

Our first experiment shows that policy practitioners are, in principle, willing to update their policy views in response to changes in scholars'/experts' collective beliefs on international policy issues. Given the abstract nature of the scenario, however, it may be useful to think of those results as a *maximal* estimate of the responsiveness of practitioners to scholars'/experts' views. Importantly, the scenario was missing much of the political and partisan content that normally attends real-world foreign policy debates and generates polarized and/or intransigent policy views; and the information on consensus among experts is explicitly hypothetical.

To get a better sense of how consensus among experts affect practitioners' views on a more concrete issue, we em-

bedded an additional experiment focused on the use of military force to signal one's credibility or resolve. The experiment briefly introduced Thomas Schelling's (1966, 124) contention that credibility is "one of the few things worth fighting over."[10] We randomly assigned respondents to conditions in which they are informed that scholars had consistently found that Schelling was correct, Schelling was incorrect, or found mixed evidence for and against Schelling's claims.[11] Following treatment, we asked "Do you agree or disagree that credibility is essential to attain their foreign policy goals?" We gave respondents a five-point agreement scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with "neither agree nor disagree" as the midpoint.

We used OLS to estimate treatment effects with indicators for treatment and plotted the estimated treatment effects and 95 percent confidence intervals in Figure 2. Here, again, we see that practitioners were broadly responsive to IR scholars' views. In the full sample, moving from the "Schelling was incorrect" condition to the "Mixed evidence" condition increased reported agreement with Schelling among respondents by about 0.31 points on our five-point scale. In substantive terms, this is about an 11 percent point increase in the share of respondents reporting agreement with Schelling. Moving from the "Schelling incorrect" condition to the "Schelling correct" condition increased agreement with Schelling among our respondents by about 0.65 points on our five-point scale. In substantive terms, this is about a 16 percent point increase in the share of respondents reporting agreement with Schelling. Splitting our results by respondent subfield shows that treatment was most effective among respondents in the security and trade issue areas. Among development respondents, moving from the "Shelling was incorrect" to "Mixed evidence" had no effect on reported agreement with Schelling, while the "Shelling was correct" condition

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[10] Schelling was discussing "face," which he argued relates to "a reputation for action." We used "credibility" as a more general term.

[11] We do not have data on the percent of studies or scholars that support or challenge Schelling. We debriefed respondents at the end of the survey, noting that they may have been provided fictional information about the level of consensus among IR scholars on defending credibility and explaining why this was necessary. We provided respondents with links to a variety of published works on credibility and foreign policy at the end of the survey.
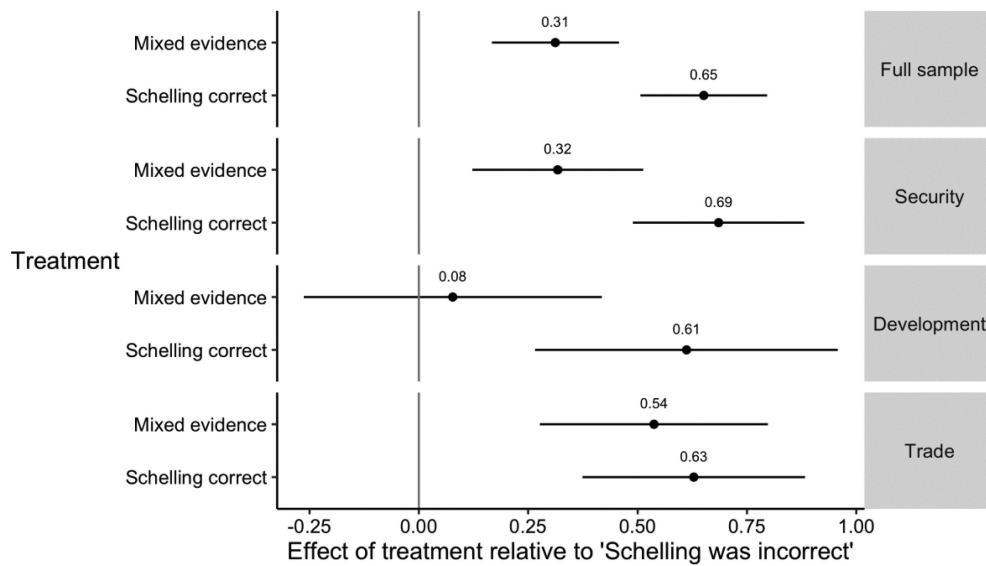
Figure 2. Effect of Scholarly Consensus on Policymaker Beliefs about Schelling's Hypothesis.

increased reported agreement by about 0.61 points on our five-point scale, a similar magnitude to that in other issue areas. Across the three subsamples, moving from one end of consensus (strong evidence that Schelling was correct) to the other (strong evidence that Schelling was incorrect) results in a statistically significant difference in views. By contrast, the "Mixed evidence" treatment resulted in more uneven effects.

It is worth noting that we obtained these treatment effects in the context of high levels of baseline agreement with Schelling. Although we did not measure the untreated level of agreement with Schelling, that value is almost certainly higher than the 83 percent agreement recovered in the "scholars disagree" treatment. Thus, while these results demonstrate that scholars can have measurable effects on policy practitioners' beliefs, the influence of scholars making consensus-based arguments for or against policies that already enjoy wide support in government may be small in practice.

Do Foreign Policy Practitioners Engage with Social Science Arguments and Evidence?

The two survey experiments analyzed above show that policy practitioners are broadly responsive when presented with academic experts' views. Epistemic consensus among scholars can measurably (though in some cases modestly) shift practitioners' views on both hypothetical and concrete problems. Next, we assess whether, when, and how policymakers engage with social science arguments and evidence through a series of behavioral and attitudinal questions. To gain causal leverage, we also use a conjoint experiment to study how respondents value different attributes of information sources they might use to learn about new policy issues. We find that policymakers are broadly willing to engage with academic work, but much more so in the trade and development areas than in security.

We asked respondents two questions about their use of social science arguments and evidence. Figure 3 displays responses to the question, "How often do you, or did you, relate the arguments and evidence made in social science research to the work that you do, or did, for the US gov-

ernment?" Overall, respondents reported that they regularly use academic ideas and data: 29 percent report using them every day and 53.9 percent use them at least a few times a week. Almost no respondents said that they never use social science research in their government work. When asked how they "relate the arguments and evidence made in social science research to the work" they do (or did) for the US government, as Figure 4 shows, respondents reported that research is more likely to provide the intellectual background or framework than to apply directly to specific components of the work.

Nevertheless, as Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate, there are statistically significant differences among security, trade, and development practitioners in their use of academic ideas and data. Security policymakers use social science research less frequently than their colleagues in trade and development: 52 percent of trade officials say they use academic research every day compared to only 21 percent of security practitioners and 27 percent of development officials.[12] Similarly, security practitioners are far less likely than trade and development officials to say that academic research applies directly to the work they do for the government. As Figure 4 shows, 78.5 percent of security officials said that "provides the intellectual background/framework of my work" is the response option that best describes how they use academic research; only 54.6 percent and 53.7 percent of trade and development practitioners, respectively, agreed. Among security officials, similarly, only 12.9 percent believe that social science research "directly applies to specific components of my work," compared to 38 percent of development and 37.8 percent of trade officials.

Our survey also asked policymakers about the role and utility of academics and academic disciplines. First, we asked, "How should academics contribute to the policymaking process?" We asked respondents to select all response options that apply. As Figure 5 illustrates, almost no respondents reported that they believe academic experts "should not be involved in the policy-making process." Large and similar majorities responded that scholars should

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[12] By "statistically significant differences" we mean that the differences between security policymakers and the other subsamples are different from zero at the 0.05-level.
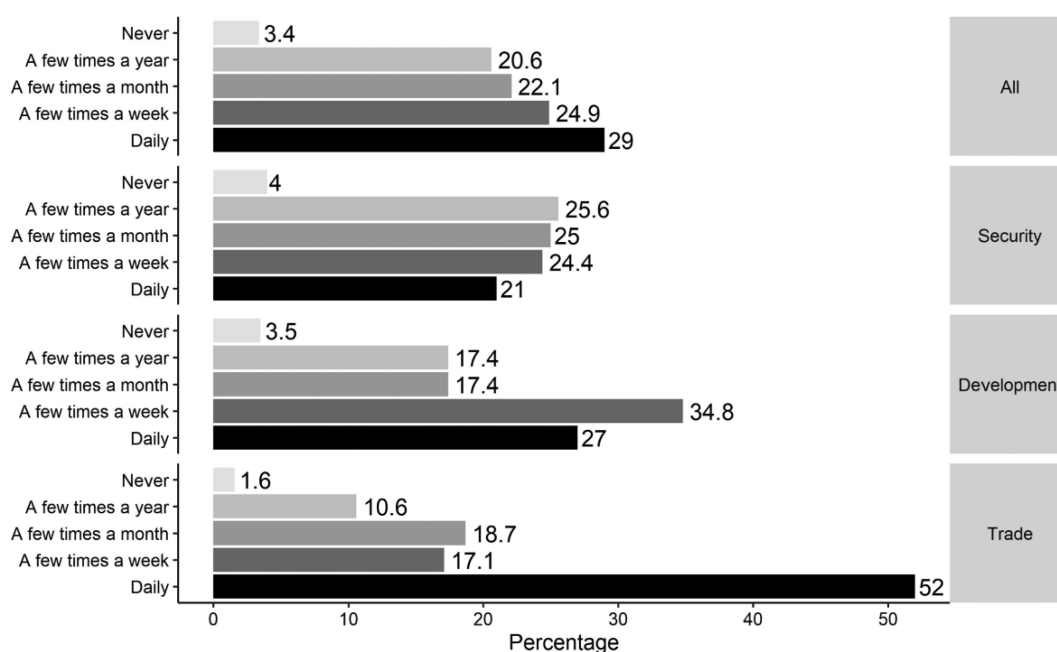
Figure 3. How often do you, or did you, relate the arguments and evidence made in social science research to the work that you do, or did, for the U.S. government? Is it...
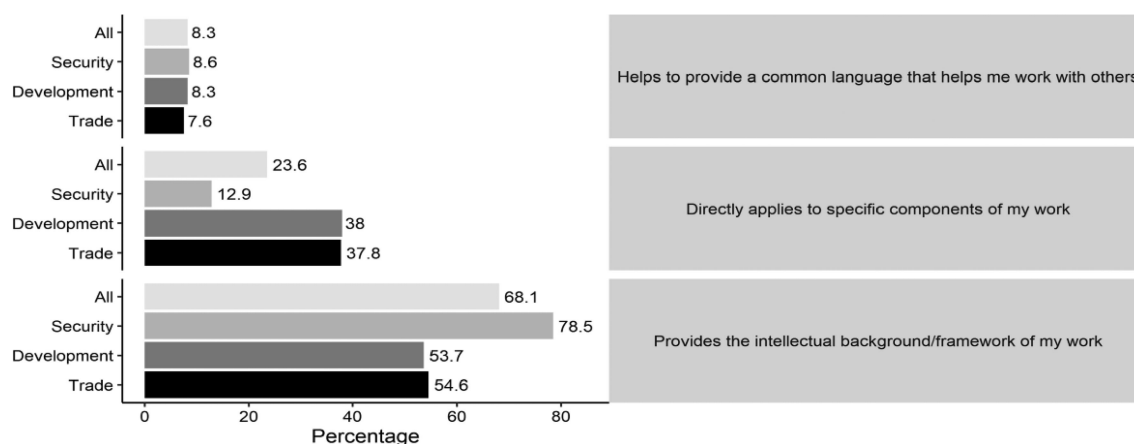
Figure 4. Which of the following best describes how you relate the arguments and evidence made in social science research to the work that you do, or did, for the U.S. government?

contribute "as creators of new information/knowledge for policy makers" and "as informal advisors," with about half as many saying that academics should serve "as formal participants" and a slim majority saying that academics should participate "as trainers of policy makers." There is significant agreement among respondents in all three fields—security, development, and trade—about the ways in which academics can best contribute to the policy process, although more trade officials (59.4 percent) than security (39.6 percent) or development practitioners (48.7 percent) believe that scholars should be formal participants.

We also asked government officials how "policy-relevant" they think several academic disciplines are. Figure 6 shows the results of the question, "How useful to policy makers are the arguments and evidence used in the following disciplines?" In general, officials reported that they found economics, international affairs, area studies, and public policy to be the most useful; and anthropology, psychology, and sociology to be the least useful to their policy work.

Not surprisingly, however, trade and development officials found economics to be more useful than their colleagues in the security arena. This difference was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Security officials found area studies more useful, trade officials favored law, and development practitioners valued public policy more than their counterparts in other fields.

As a final means of measuring policymakers' engagement with academics and academic ideas and data, we asked respondents about the usefulness of different types of information and conducted a discrete choice conjoint experiment to measure how respondents value different attributes of information sources that they might use to learn about new policy issues. The results indicate, among other things, that practitioners value academic articles more highly than commonly thought.

Conventional wisdom suggests that academic research is not as relevant or useful to practitioners compared to other, more policy-oriented, outputs. Academic, peer-reviewed
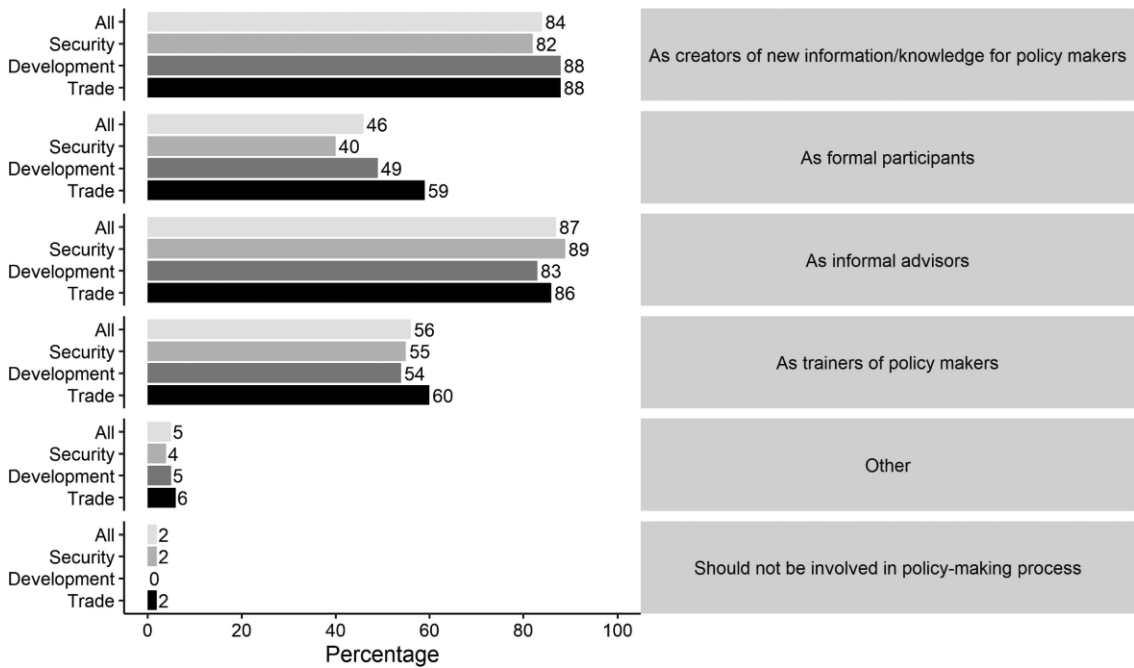
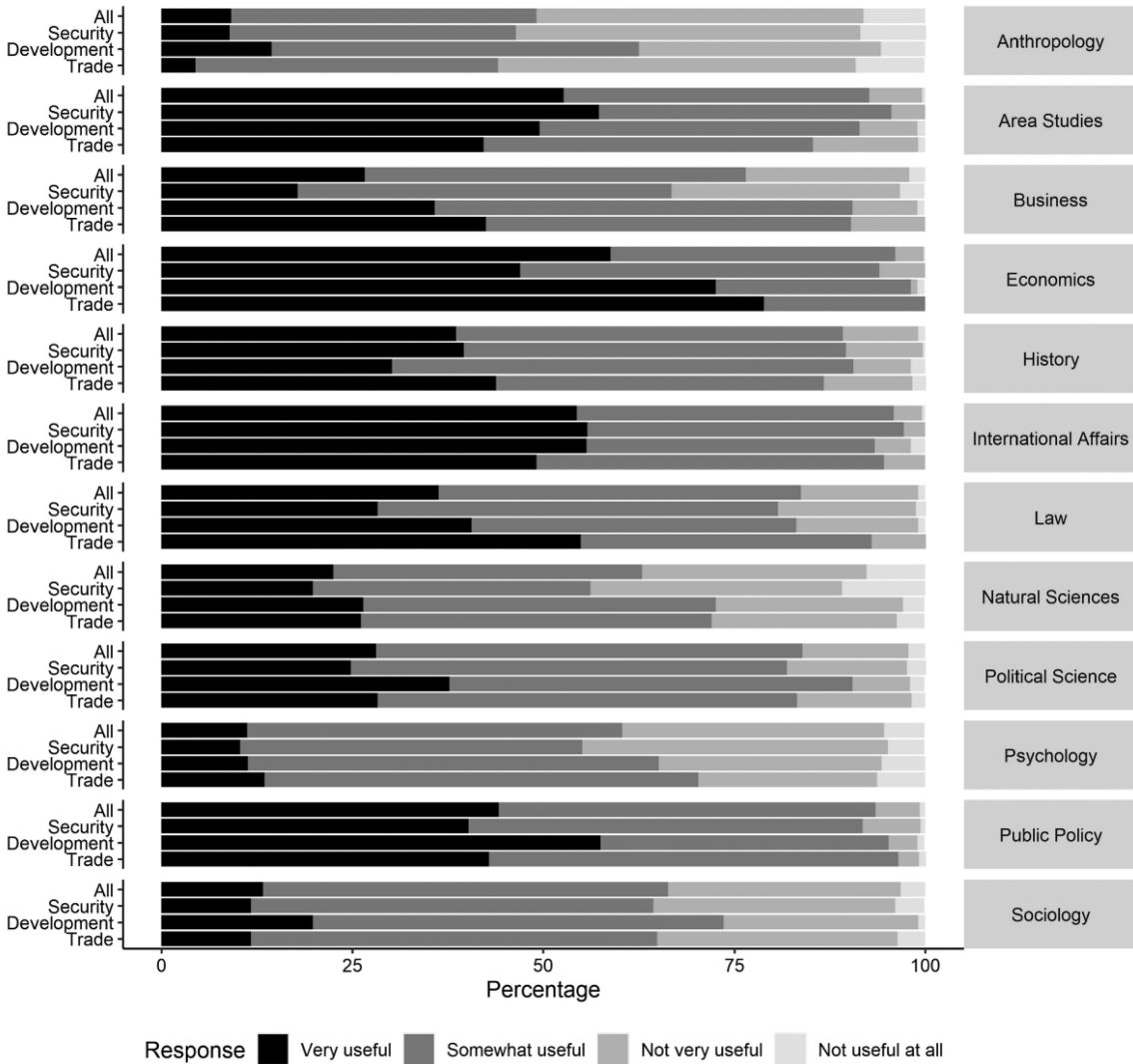**Figure 5.** How should scholars contribute to the policy-making process?

Figure 6. How useful to policy makers are the arguments and evidence used in the following disciplines?

works tend to be "inward-looking and concerned with arcane debate" (Gallucci 2012), and the review and publication process takes too long for these publications to influence policy debates (Bennett and Ikenberry 2006). Indeed, respondents partly confirmed this view in their answers to the question, "In the context of your job in the US government, how important are the following sources of information?" As Figure 7 shows, respondents find academic books and articles less useful than other sources of information, such as classified reports, newspapers and news magazines, think tank reports and policy journal articles. Surprisingly—given the recent trend among scholars to make their work more accessible through blog posts, online articles, and enhanced media presence—security, trade, and development practitioners found scholarly journal articles to be more useful than blogs, television and radio, and commentary on social media. Although only 7.2 percent of respondents reported that academic books, and 18.9 percent found scholarly articles, to be "very important" sources of information for their work, 49.3 percent said that academic books and 64.8 percent said that scholarly articles are "very important" or "somewhat important."

At first glance, it appears that there is relatively little disagreement across issue areas that scholarly articles and books, while useful, are not among the most useful sources of information available to policy officials. Among security and defense practitioners, 49.7 percent said that books were important or very important sources, compared to 46.3 percent of trade officials and 51.3 percent of development officials. Security officials are somewhat less likely than their counterparts in trade and development to believe that academic books are very important to their work for the government (5.6 percent compared to 8.9 and 9.6 percent in trade and development, respectively).

We find larger differences with respect to the importance of peer-reviewed journal articles. Although 32.0 percent of trade officials and 26.1 percent of development officials find scholarly articles to be very important sources of information for their work, only 11.5 percent of security officials do. These differences are large and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Notably, security officials also were more likely to rate classified US government reports as very important. We find, in short, that policymakers value academic research—especially scholarly, peer-reviewed articles—more than the conventional wisdom suggests, but security officials differ from their colleagues in other fields in their views on the utility of academic research. The conventional wisdom, then, is only partially correct and more accurately reflects the views of security officials than those of practitioners in other areas of US foreign policy.

In addition to asking respondents about the importance of various types of information, we also used a conjoint experiment to study what kinds of research outputs are most useful to policy practitioners (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014).[13] In the experiment, we presented respondents with two research outputs that we described in abstract terms. We asked respondents to consider which output would be most useful if they needed to "learn about a policy problem with which [they] had no past experience." Additionally, we asked respondents to rate the likely usefulness of each resource on a scale from 0 (not useful at all) to 10 (extremely useful). Each respondent completed three comparison tasks.

We characterized each research output on five dimensions: (1) the format of the output (blog post, book, social media commentary, op-ed or news article, policy brief, policy journal article, think tank report, TV or radio show, US government report); (2) author's current professional affiliation (university, advocacy organization, federally funded research and development center [FFRDC], news outlet, think tank, US government); (3) author's highest degree (BA, MA, PhD); (4) author's degree field (history, international affairs, political science, economics, sociology, STEM); and (5) whether the author had previously worked in government.

The experiment allows us to learn how the perceived usefulness of research outputs changes as we change features of the author or publication. We estimate the average marginal component effect (AMCE) of each kind of attribute value relative to a given baseline attribute. We anchor each attribute to a stereotypically academic output. We present the results of the discrete choice exercise in Figure 8 and the rating exercise in Figure 9. The results differ somewhat across the two measures of the dependent variable. We view the discrete choice task as representing how a time and/or resource constrained policy practitioner might make choices about what to consume, while the ratings task might represent how a practitioner with the time and/or appetite to consume more broadly might prioritize their consumption of research outputs. We discuss each in turn.

The results show that relative to a research output by an individual with a university affiliation, research authored by an individual working at an advocacy group or, more surprisingly, the US government is viewed as *less likely* to be useful to respondents. The probability of selection declines by about 5 percent points for outputs authored by advocacy group affiliates and by about 10 percent points for outputs authored by US government affiliates. Additionally, outputs by individuals working at FFRDCs and news outlets are somewhat less likely to be viewed as useful relative to outputs by those at universities, but the estimated effect size is small and not statistically significant. Strikingly, and in contrast to debates about the irrelevance of the academy relative to think tanks, practitioners are no more or less likely to view work as useful if it is authored by someone with a primary affiliation at a think tank.

We now turn to education, field of study, and past government service. Relative to an author with a BA, work produced by individuals with higher levels of education is more likely to be viewed as useful. Interestingly, we see no discernable field of study effects. We chose economics as a baseline because of the widely held belief that relative to other fields of social science, practitioners hold economists' recommendations in relatively greater esteem (Drezner 2017, 104–08; Maliniak et al. 2020, 16–21). Here, we find no evidence of such effects and, if anything, work by those trained in other fields may be viewed as more useful than that authored by someone with a degree in economics.

Notably, we see that past government service by an author increases the probability that a resource will be rated as useful. This appears to contrast with our affiliation results. Respondents may have viewed those with current government affiliations quite differently than those with prior experience since the former are more likely to be constrained by a need to support, or at least not openly criticize, current policy. Future research can usefully assess this claim.

Finally, we turn to the research output type. Although we lack the statistical power to precisely estimate the relative utility of each format, we are able to both confirm and falsify parts of the conventional wisdom. First, we see that—relative

[13] Conjoints are widely used in political science to study how individuals choose between alternatives that differ on a large number of dimensions (Bansak et al. 2020). See Appendix D for example choice task.
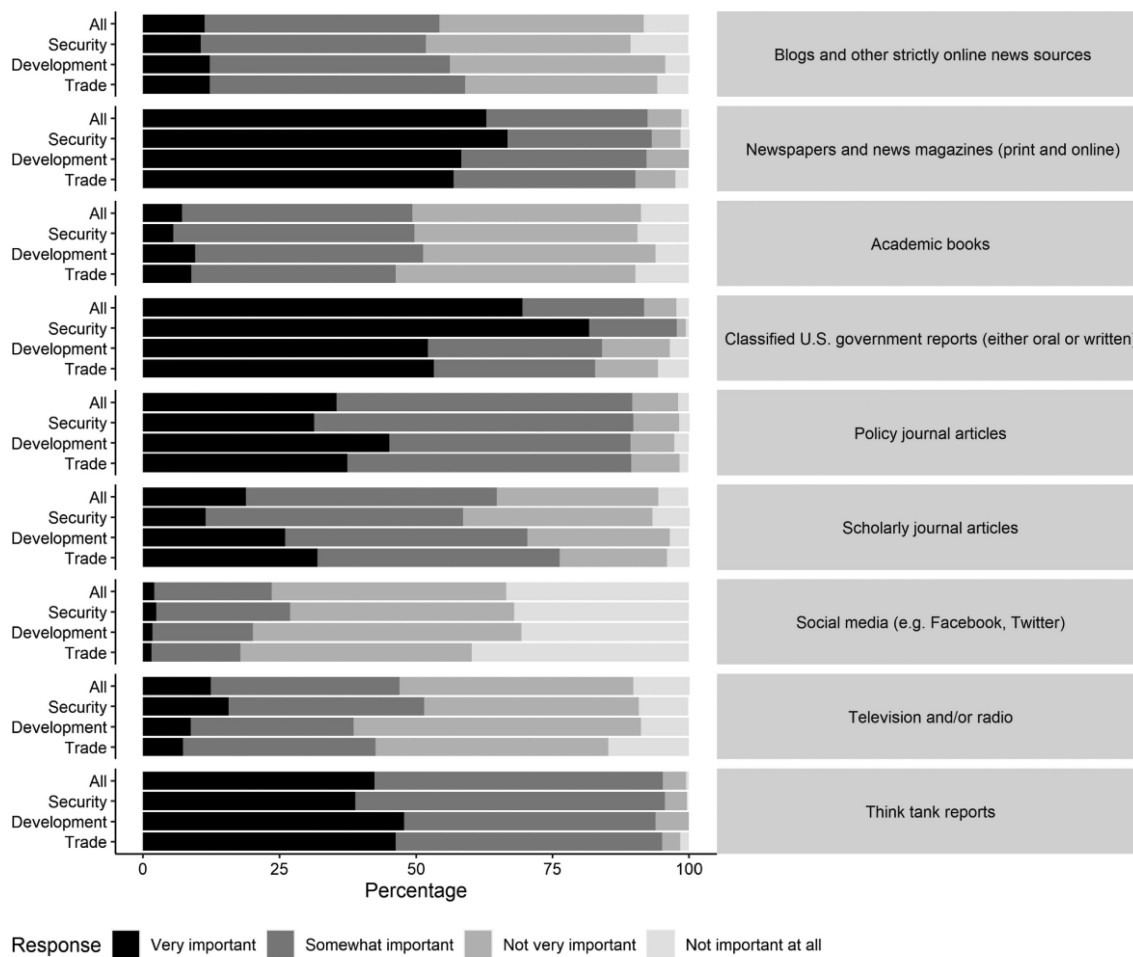
Figure 7. In the context of your job in the U.S. government, how important are the following sources of information?

to scholarly articles—blog posts, commentary on social media, and TV or radio show reports are less useful to practitioners. This is striking for reasons noted earlier. When viewed in light of the results about utility, however, it seems likely that commentary on social media is not viewed as particularly useful, but blogs that link to scholarly work are more likely to be seen as useful. Second, we see that relative to a scholarly journal article, many common research outputs that are thought to be more useful to and consumable by policy practitioners (policy briefs, think tank reports, government reports, etc.) are no more or less useful to practitioners.

Relaxing the forced choice requirement yields broadly similar findings, with two exceptions. Although respondents conditioned their responses in the discrete choice setting on affiliation and past government service, they did not do so when allowed to rate both resources individually. For the other features, however, the pattern of results is largely similar to the discrete choice setting: Respondents found blog posts, social media commentary, and TV or radio reports to be less useful than scholarly articles, but did not find scholarly articles to differ in usefulness from a number of other output types that are widely considered practitioner-friendly.

Hypothetical discrete choice experiments like the one we used here are sometimes criticized for exaggerating estimated effects because the choices being made are not consequential for respondents; but that is not what we find here. If practitioners had strong prejudices about research outputs, we should see large changes in relative usefulness. Instead,

we see that very different kinds of outputs (journal articles versus think tank reports versus books) produce only small and often statistically insignificant changes in usefulness ratings. As such, it may mean that the utility of different outputs depends more on the content of the research or on who recommends that research than on its format, author, or sponsor. In short, the message may matter as much, or more than, the medium.

Are Social Scientific Research Methods Useful to Foreign Policymakers?

One common critique of contemporary IR and political science is that these disciplines are focused more on technique than on substance (e.g., Walt 1999; Oren 2015; Desch 2015, 2019). Our survey reinforces some of this conventional wisdom but suggests that portions are not, or are no longer, true. Across all three subfields studied—security, trade, and development—policy makers consistently found formal methods, purely theoretical analyses, interpretivist approaches, and experimental methods to be the least useful approaches. With the exception of experiments, these methods tend to be abstract, often privileging sophisticated and complex designs or epistemological and ontological critique of "traditional" or "mainstream" approaches. Conversely, respondents found policy analysis, contemporary case studies, area studies, historical case studies, and surveys to be the most useful approaches. The extent to which respondents found quantitative analyses useful challenges the conventional wisdom: 83.9 percent of all respondents
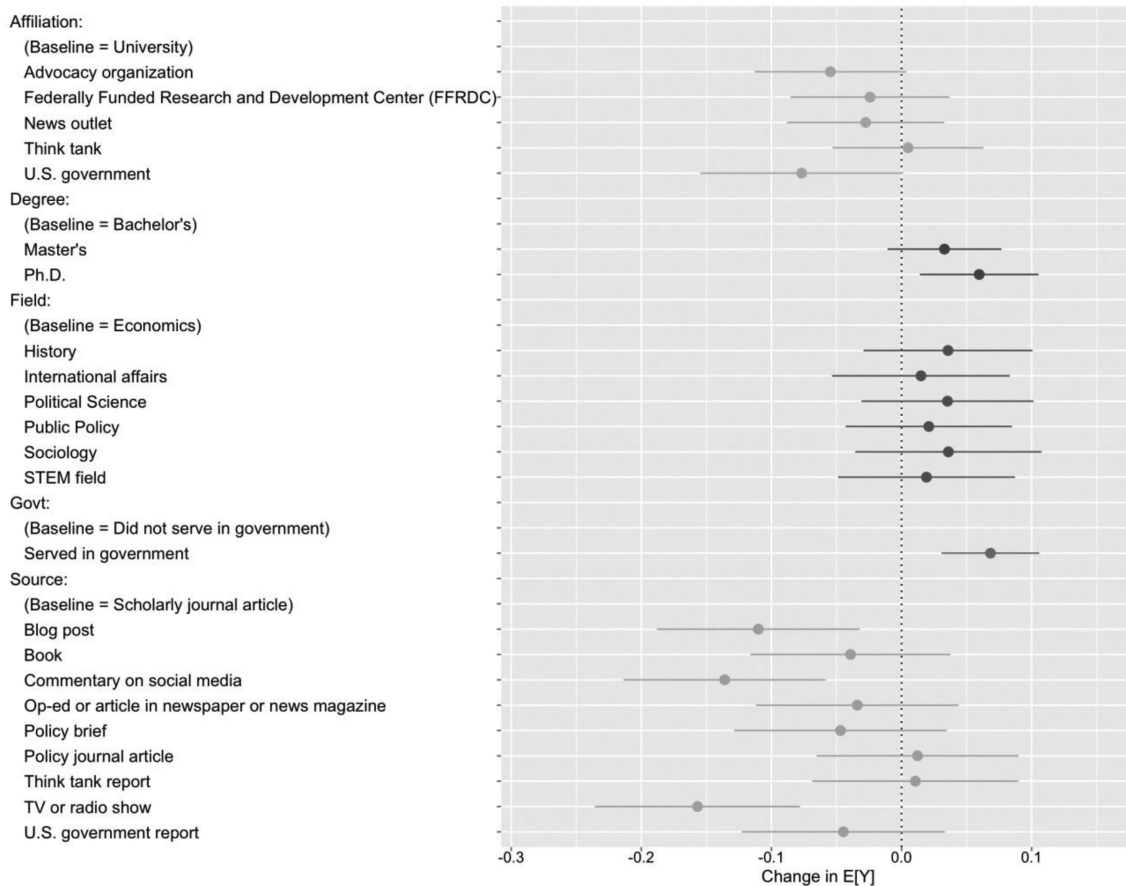
Figure 8. Factors Shaping the Utility of Research Outputs (Discrete Choice).

said they are very or somewhat useful. Faculty guesses about what practitioners will find useful—based on the results of the 2014 TRIP survey of 1,620 IR professors at US colleges and universities—tracks closely with what practitioners actually say on the 2018 policymaker survey they find useful. Figure 10 illustrates the responses from the policymaker survey, while Figure 11 shows faculty responses to the question, "How useful are the following kinds of IR research to policy practitioners."

At the same time that we see clear patterns among policy officials in their assessment of social science methods, we again find strong differences across the three issue areas in which policymakers work.[14] Security officials were the most likely to find area studies/ethnography and historical case studies helpful. Security practitioners also were more skeptical of mathematical methods—including quantitative and formal—surveys, experiments, and interpretivist analyses. Trade policymakers are the most receptive to statistical

approaches, with 60.2 percent describing such methods as very useful compared to 44.2 percent of development officials and 24.1 percent of security practitioners. More than three-quarters of security officials' find quantitative approaches valuable, but they are less enthusiastic about these quantitative methods than their trade and development counterparts. The difference in responses between trade and development officials and security officials was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

It also is worth highlighting that there has been some increase over time in security officials' valuation of quantitative methods alongside a decline in their assessment of area studies/ethnographic approaches and case studies. If we use a four-point scale to measure the mean value of respondents' opinion about the utility of various social science methods (1 = not useful at all, 2 = not very useful, 3 = somewhat useful, 4 = very useful), we can track change in national security officials' assessment of the utility of different social science methods between the 2011 survey that Avey and Desch (2014) described and the 2018 survey described here. In 2011, the mean value that these policymakers placed on quantitative methods was 2.81; by 2018 it was 2.96. The percent of security respondents who described statistical approaches as very useful jumped by 5.5 percent points. The proportion who described these methods as not useful at all dropped by 2.7 points, and those who labeled quantitative methods as not very useful fell 2.9 percent points. The overall increase in the perceptions of the usefulness of quantitative methods by security officials from 2011 to the 2018 survey was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Similarly, security officials' assessment of the

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[14] These differences are generally not driven by differences in the demographic composition of the subsamples. For example, we find suggestive evidence of a generalized effect of gender. Compared to similarly situated women, men rated as less useful the following methods: contemporary case studies, experiments, formal models, interpretivist analysis, policy analysis, quantitative analysis, surveys, and theoretical analysis. Of all the methods we asked about, men rated only area studies and historical case studies as more useful than their women colleagues. These differences, however, were generally small and often not statistically significant. Subsampling reduces our statistical power, but reveals that this effect is not driven by the large proportion of men in the security subsample, as some readers might suspect. If anything, there is a larger gender gap for some methods in the development and trade subsamples. See Appendix E for full results. On gendered differences in methodological preference among male and female IR scholars see Maliniak et al. 2008, 135–36.
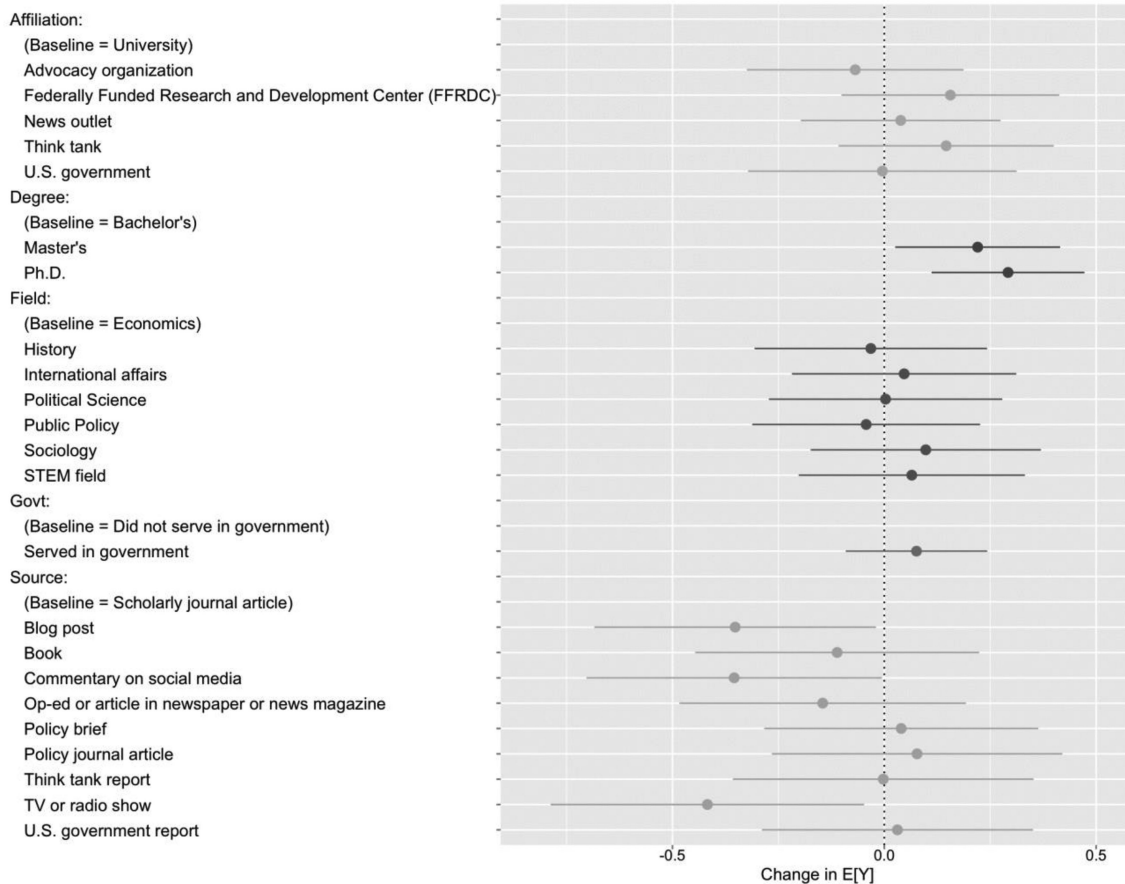
Figure 9. Factors Shaping the Utility of Research Outputs (Rating Exercise).

utility of other, more qualitative approaches dropped between 2011 and 2018. The mean value that security and defense officials placed on area studies/ethnography fell from 3.63 to 3.5, and historical and contemporary case studies dropped slightly (from 3.49 to 3.42 and from 3.56 to 3.53, respectively). Support for policy analysis grew (from 3.46 to 3.54), if by a smaller amount than quantitative methods.[15]

Our survey included several additional questions that speak to the utility of different methodological approaches to the study of IR and social science, more generally, and the results were generally consistent with those we presented above. We asked half our sample: "How important is it for job candidates to have specific types of technical skills when you are/were hiring someone to work in your department/office/unit?" They then evaluated seven different sets of research and other skills. Although 41.6 percent of all policymakers reported that "statistical analysis expertise" was a "very important" or "important" skill for job candidates (rather than "somewhat important," "not very important," or "not at all important"), this set of skills lagged behind all the other skills we asked about except computer programming.[16]

The relatively low valuation of statistical approaches in the overall sample is driven by the size of the subsample of security policymakers. As responses to other questions show, security officials tend to be more skeptical of the utility of quantitative approaches for policy work. Only 4.7 percent of security respondents believe it is very important that job candidates have statistical skills, and another 20.8 percent consider such skills to be important. When we remove security officials from the results, however, we see that 25.2 percent of respondents find quantitative methods to be very important skills, and another 35.8 percent said they were important. This difference between security officials and trade/development officials was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. As Figure 12 shows, trade policymakers report that expertise in statistical methods is an essential skill; greater percentages of trade officials report that such approaches are important or very important skills for job candidates than say the same of any of the other six skills we asked about. Both security and development policymakers tend to put greater emphasis than trade officials on area studies, case study analysis, and foreign language fluency.

We asked the second group in the split sample: "When thinking about hiring employees with an MA in Public Policy or International Affairs, what type of coursework is most valuable from your perspective as a government official?" Officials in this group then evaluated seven different course subjects, and Figure 13 illustrates their responses. As in the first group, quantitative methods finish behind all other subjects except computer programming, but 60.5 percent of all policy officials surveyed said that statistics courses are valuable or very valuable.

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[15] Already low, policymakers' valuation of the usefulness of purely theoretical approaches fell further, from a mean of 2.54 in 2011 to 2.46 in 2018. The officials' assessment of formal models remained relatively constant (2.32 in 2011 and 2.31 in 2018).

[16] Respondent age was positively correlated with higher computer programming ratings in responses to the questions reported in Figures 12 and 13.
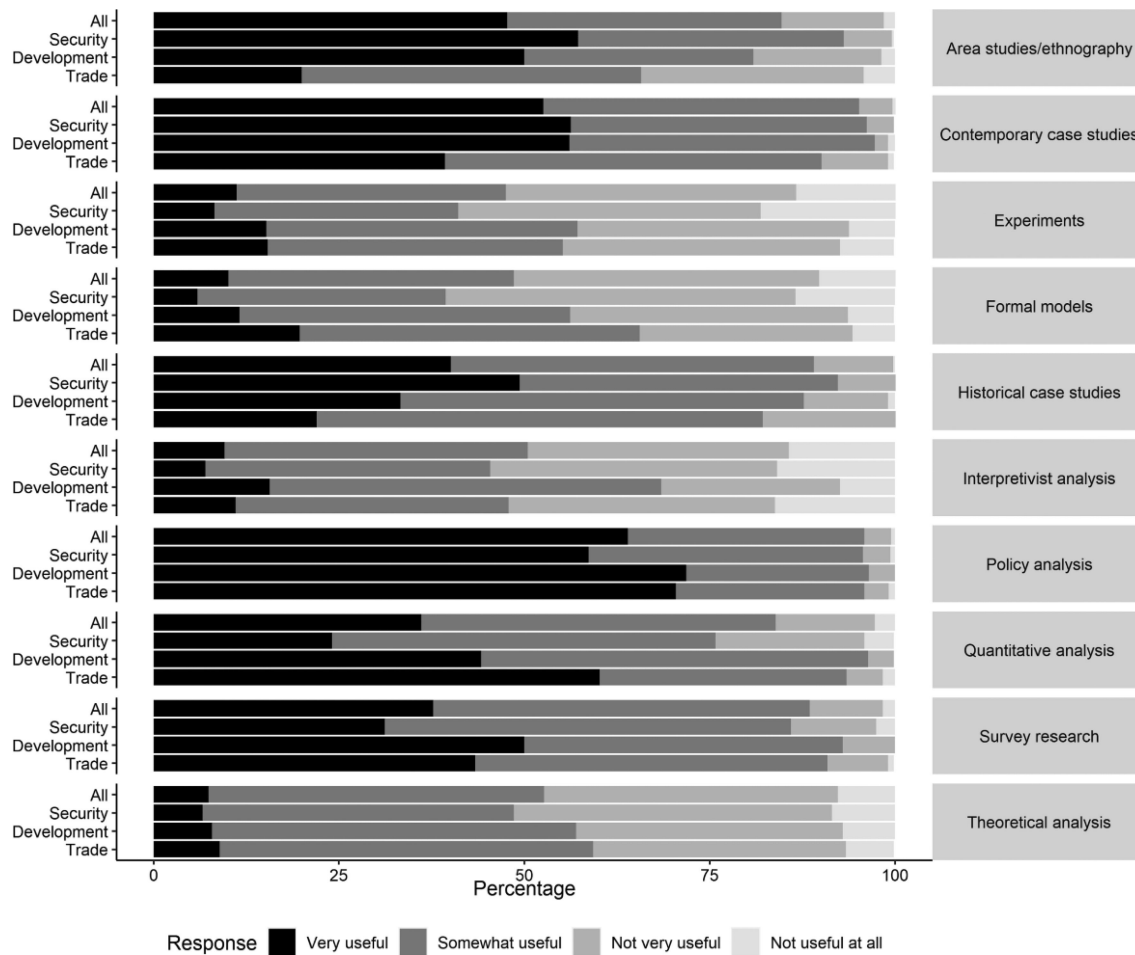
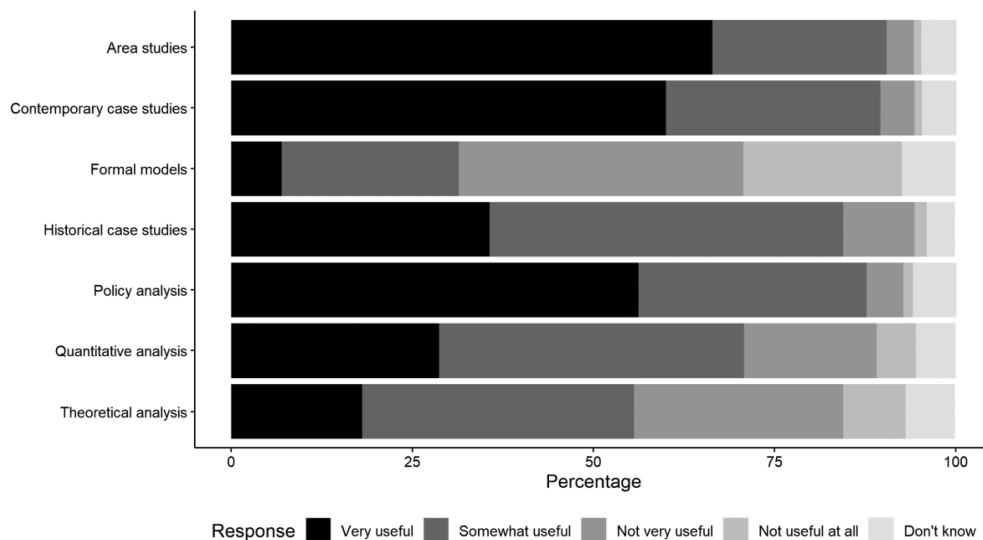**Figure 10.** The Utility of Methods According to Policy Practitioners.

Figure 11. IR Faculty Assessment of the Usefulness of Different Types of Research to Policymakers.

Again, as Figure 13 shows, we found considerable differences across subject areas. Security and defense practitioners believed that quantitative methods courses were less valuable than their colleagues in trade and development (49.4 percent of security policymakers said these courses are valuable or very valuable, compared to 88.4 percent of trade and 68.6 percent of development practitioners), and this difference was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. We see similar differences in respondents' assessment of the value of coursework in cost-benefit analysis, with
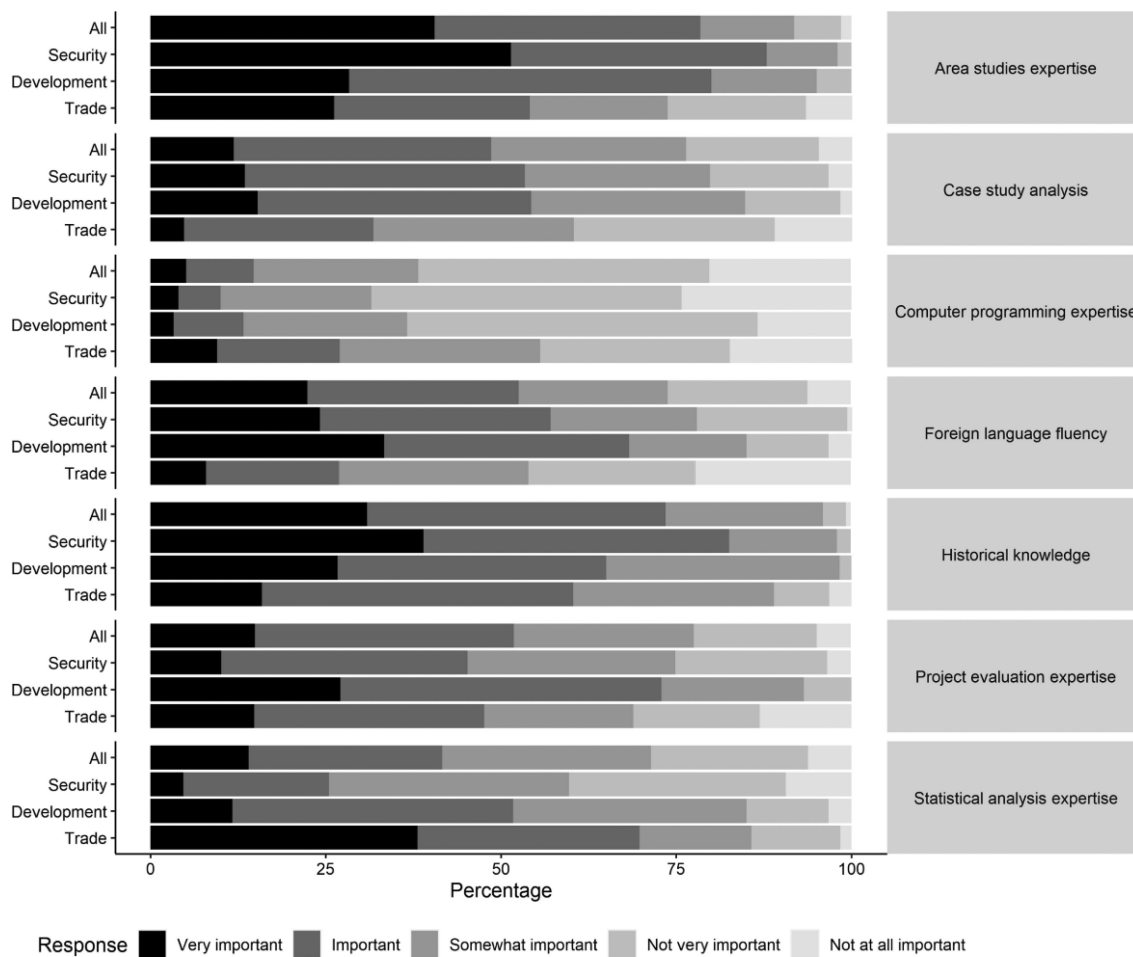
Figure 12. How important is it for job candidates to have specific types of technical skills when you are/were hiring someone to work in your department/office/unit?

58.7 percent of security, 73 percent of trade, and 78.4 percent of development officials saying such courses are valuable or very valuable. Security policymakers emphasized the importance of history courses to a greater extent than their colleagues in other fields; development officials stressed project evaluation; and both sets of practitioners emphasized foreign-language training for their employees.

Finally, we asked all respondents about the obstacles to applying academic ideas and data to policy work. Their answers give us another window into policymakers' views on the utility of quantitative methods. Figure 14 shows results for the question, "For your colleagues in government service, how significant are the following potential obstacles to using academic knowledge in their work?" Respondents consistently report that they do not have enough time to follow academic work, academic work is too abstract, and scholarly research is not timely. What they did not report, however, is that academic work is too quantitative; this is the least significant obstacle for policymakers to use academic knowledge. Again, we see variation across issue areas with security officials viewing quantitative methods, and nearly every other potential obstacle we asked about, as a somewhat greater impediment than their colleagues in other fields do. More security practitioners (14.6 percent compared to 8.9 percent in development and 3.3 percent in trade) reported that the statement "academic work is too quantitative" describes a "very significant" obstacle to using academic knowledge in their policy work. This may explain some of

the difference in security practitioners' greater skepticism of these approaches. At the same time, work being too quantitative was the *smallest* reported obstacle for security officials among the different options. Along with the results above, this suggests that the larger issue is not that security officials do not understand these approaches, but that they are somewhat less relevant for practitioners' specific problem sets.

Why Is Security An Outlier?

Our results highlight a number of key similarities in practitioners' views of the usefulness of social science (e.g., lack of time to engage social science work) across our sample. But there also were important differences across the groups. The results of our survey suggest that factors specific to issue area shape policymakers' views. An approach that is useful to understanding general trade practices between countries may be less helpful to officials tasked with making targeted investments in a developing community. This could explain, for example, why on each question about the usefulness of area studies (Figures 6, 10, 12) the mean response for development officials is significantly higher than trade respondents. Similar patterns are apparent on other issues, with security officials sometimes closer to trade or development officials than the latter two are to one another. The most consistent differences across the groups,
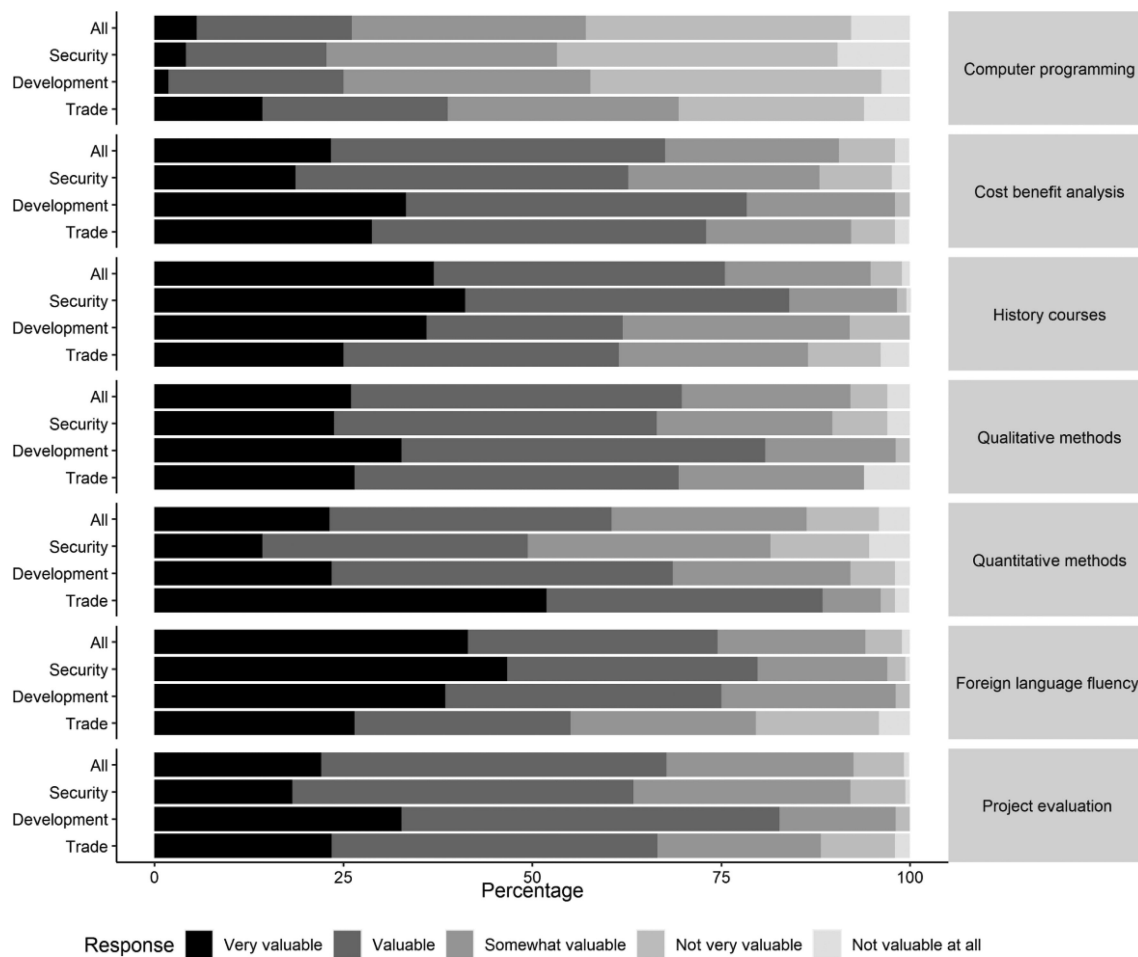
Figure 13. When thinking about hiring employees with an M.A. in Public Policy or International Affairs, what types of coursework is most valuable from your perspective as a government official?

however, are between security policymakers and the more economics-oriented development and trade officials.[17]

There are at least two possible reasons why security officials may differ in their approach to using social science research, both of which are rooted in the nature of the policy problems that practitioners confront. First, the dynamics of the security issue area are often different from those in trade and development. Most importantly, relations among actors in the security arena are often zero-sum, where actors pursue their own advantage at the expense of others. In contrast to such a world of relative gains seeking, trade and development tend to operate in a world of absolute gains in which actors can more easily cooperate to pursue mutual advantage. To be sure, cooperation is quite common in the security realm, but "the special peril of defection" makes it far less common than in trade and development (Lipson 1984, 14). Why, exactly, this leads policymakers in the various issue areas to adopt different approaches to theory and model exposition or alternative approaches to empirical testing is a question that requires much deeper thought and more extensive exposition than we can provide here. Perhaps it has to do with trade policy being about changing structure to affect the incentives of other actors, while a lot of national security policy is made within fixed structural

constraints, whereas development stands somewhere in between them. Thus, security, on the one hand, and trade and development, on the other, often produce strikingly different logics of IR, making the application of universal models of state behavior inappropriate (See Baldwin 1993).

A second important difference is the nature of the data in economic and development fields compared to security. Events of interest in trade and development take place on a regular basis, providing a wealth of data points readily amenable to quantitative analysis. By contrast, many core security issues such as war or nuclear strikes are (thankfully) rare. This limits the potential utility to practitioners of approaches that require large numbers of observations. Moreover, economic data is typically more accessible relative to key data in the national security domain. As a result, scholars in economic-related fields are more likely to have access to much of the same data as, or even develop the data for, practitioners in those fields. In contrast, the defense and intelligence sectors are often cloaked in secrecy, limiting both data availability and opportunities for scholars to participate in conversations. Practitioners may be skeptical of scholarly conclusions drawn from incomplete information.

In our view, the most important potential objection to the explanation we develop here is that respondent familiarity with advanced social science approaches is driving this variation. Indeed, we find some evidence for this. Security officials in the 2018 survey were more likely to rate quantitative methods as more useful than those in

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[17] The 2017 TRIP Faculty Survey found similar issue-area differences: 26 percent of security scholars, 38 percent of development and 44 percent of international political economy scholars use quantitative methods.
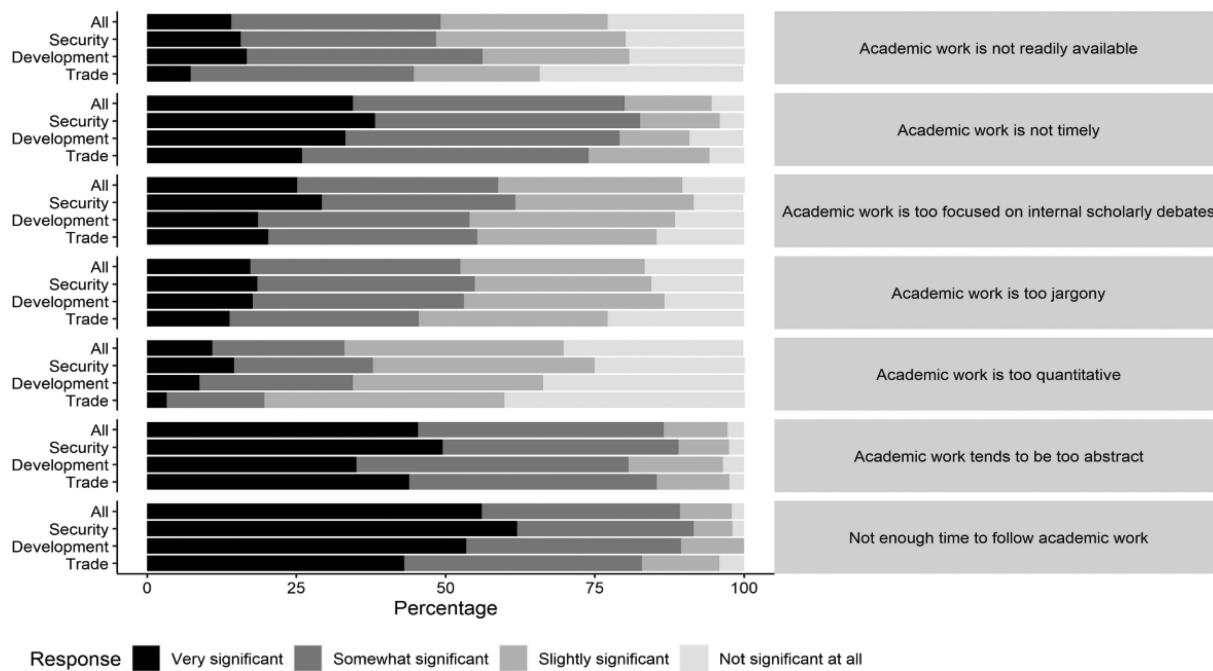
Figure 14. For your colleagues in government service, how significant are the following potential obstacles to using academic knowledge in their work?

Avey and Desch's (2014) earlier study. This may reflect the fact that our 2018 survey captured a new generation of officials, many working at lower levels of government, who may be more familiar with these tools than senior officials or policymakers in the past. Additionally, a higher percent of trade than national security officials in our sample had PhDs, suggesting that a higher level of education may make practitioners more amenable to econometric approaches. In other words, education, rather than issue area, may be driving the variation we document. However, respondent-level demographic characteristics, including age and educational attainment, are not reliable predictors of openness to any particular research method within any of the three subsamples (See Appendix E for full results).

Our claim that issue area explains variation across groups of policymakers adds important conditions to debates about the role of social science methodology in policy relevance. Policymakers clearly vary by issue area in how they view the utility of scholarly techniques, whether qualitative or quantitative. It is not the case that practitioners reject theoretical models and mathematical approaches across the board. Yet scholars should nonetheless resist the temptation to assume that, because one discipline, economics, seems to be highly policy-relevant while embracing sophisticated research tools, those approaches will automatically find audiences ready to make *direct* use of them across different issue areas.[18]

Conclusion

Our results suggest a more complex picture than many on both sides of the Ivory Tower/Beltway bridge have previously painted. For those who have emphasized the large gap,

we demonstrate that policymakers seek scholarly expertise, and are responsive to it when these experts agree on the effects of a policy proposal. Policymakers are not averse to more technical research methods, even if security practitioners see less utility in these methods than their colleagues in trade or development. Surprisingly, policymakers are more receptive to traditional modes of scholarly publication like books and articles than to blog posts and commentary on social media.

We also see signs, however, that academic social science is still not providing what policymakers want, and not just in the security subfield. Although scholars have a pretty good sense of which approaches are useful to policymakers, there remains a disconnection between the two groups. Answers to the 2017 TRIP Faculty Survey (United States) about scholars' primary research approaches differ significantly, for example, from those to the 2014 Faculty Survey question about scholars' assessment of the utility to policymakers of various methods. Less than 10 percent of scholars reported in 2017 that they employ policy analysis as their primary method, while in 2014, over 56 percent identified this approach as very useful to policymakers. Our survey results support scholars' intuition on the utility of this approach for practitioners. Looking at this another way, the data in the TRIP Journal Article Database show that articles employing policy analysis (and making explicit policy prescriptions) have been steadily declining since 1980.[19] In other words, there remains a significant gap between what scholars think policymakers want and how they conduct their own research.

Our findings also suggest that consensus is a factor in scholarly influence on policy practitioners. That may be a serious obstacle as IR remains a contentious field; even the few findings that seem close to achieving scholarly consensus, such as the Democratic Peace, continue to be debated (McDonald 2015; Barnhart et al. 2020). Given this lack of

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[18] Perhaps the influence of economics is overstated as Figures 8 and 9 suggest or that the source of economists' influence does not stem from their more technical approach. See also Drezner (2017, 115–22); Desch (2019, 248–49).

[19] This is especially the case outside the journals *International Security* and *Security Studies*. Hoagland et al. (2020).

consensus, IR scholars may continue to struggle to reach a broader audience, including policymakers (Cross 2013; Drezner 2017, 116–17). This is not to claim that consensus within an epistemic community is the only or even the primary pathway for influence. At times arguments can be repurposed or take root despite widespread scholarly skepticism (Eriksson and Norman 2011; Kreps and Weeks 2020). A disputed but timely idea may carry the day when a decision has to be made, thus highlighting the tension between lack of scholarly consensus on an issue and an alternative concern that academic work is not timely. To the extent that normal science proceeds incrementally and many policy decisions are evolutionary, it is likely that consensus will matter in routine and common academic-policy interactions. And, of course, practitioners may use academic knowledge like the proverbial drunkard uses a lamp post—more for support than illumination. Future research ought to explore these dynamics further.

We close with recommendations for two related groups of scholars: those who want to speak more effectively to policymakers and those who want to understand the waxing and waning of scholarly engagement with the policy world.

For the former, we offer five suggestions. First, since scholarly consensus seems important to policymakers, yet remains elusive in the social sciences on most issues, it is essential that scholars have a clear and persuasive argument for why their findings or recommendations should be taken seriously by policymakers, even in the face of dissensus. Second, policymakers are eclectic in terms of the research approaches they find useful. Their primary concern is that whatever method is used—surveys, historical or contemporary case studies, in-depth area knowledge, or quantitative analysis—best provides insight into their problem set. Variation by subfield in our survey supports the notion that different skill sets are applicable to different problems. Third, since limited time remains an obstacle for policymakers, journal articles and other shorter pieces are more likely to gain a policymaker's ear than books or long articles. Fourth, policymakers find the "abstract" character of some academic work off-putting—this no doubt explains their reservations about pure theory, formal methods, and abstruse interpretivist approaches—and so scholars need to ensure that the concrete policy implications of their work are crystal clear. Finally, even the briefest and clearest scholarship will not help a policymaker if it arrives too late to inform a policy decision.

For those interested in the theory-policy gap as a research area, we note that, although our results have resolved some puzzles and provided deeper insight into how policymakers in various issue areas think about the utility of social science, they have left other puzzles unresolved and raised new ones requiring further research. It remains unclear, for instance, why policymakers still regard teaching, one of the core pillars of the scholarly enterprise, as a less important contribution to the policy process. Only 56 percent of respondents agreed that scholars should train policymakers. One possibility suggested by Blankshain, Cooper, and Gvosdev (2021) is that scholars currently do an uneven job of teaching future policymakers how to assess and incorporate academic scholarship into their daily work. Alternatively, it could be that respondents misunderstood our intent; perhaps the word "training" was not as helpful as "teaching" might have been. Some may have been thinking of their own education in college or graduate school, but others may have recalled suffering through a mandatory workshop or continuing education program.

In terms of new puzzles, there seems to be some tension between our finding that policymakers are not averse to quantitative analysis in research and practitioners' belief that facility in quantitative methods is not, relatively speaking, an essential requirement for people working in government. Also, our findings confirm that time constraints are a powerful obstacle to policymakers using academic work; yet they indicate, surprisingly, that policymakers regard scholarly books and journals as more useful than blogs and other social media venues for accessing scholarly research. Blogs and new media tend to be short, clear, and timely, at least compared with other scholarly products; yet they are gaining only modest traction in the policy world (see also Avey et al. forthcoming). Finally, it would be helpful to clarify what policymakers mean when they say a discipline, argument, or approach is "useful." Do they mean the same thing scholars mean when they respond to questions trying to gauge utility? Our work here could help inform the design of more fine-grained assessments of practitioners' interest in engaging with social scientists in settings that have real-world consequences.[20]

The most important limitation of our study involves the age profile of our pool. There are good reasons to think that younger policy practitioners, or at least those lower down in the bureaucracy whose job descriptions are more focused on analysis than policymaking, might have different views from older and higher-ranking officials. Despite our efforts to address this by going further down the bureaucratic ladder in constructing the pool for this survey, the average age of our respondents was slightly higher than in the 2011 survey (Avey and Desch 2014). To reach a significantly more youthful audience, it will be necessary to find other ways of polling younger government officials who constitute the next generation of practitioners that scholars need to engage.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available in the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

Funding Information

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[20] Riley et al. (2019), for example, use field experiments to study interest among nongovernmental organizations in collaborating with scholars on impact evaluations. Our findings could inform the design of similar field experiments to match policy practitioners with scholars who possess relevant expertise.

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