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Factors that Shape U.S. Public Opinion on Foreign Policy

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Introduction to Research

- This study explores the factors that influence an individual's perception of the war in Afghanistan as an effective means to decrease the threat of terrorism.
- Ideology, gender, and worldview (measured through religion and ideology) are predictors of an individual's opinion on war
- A pro-war (hawkish) perspective is associated with conservative ideology
 - Public opinion has been found to be centrist in cases such as the Iran hostage crisis where the majority of the U.S. public favored moderate reactions
- Men are more likely than women to have a hawkish attitude
- Evangelical Christians have been found to be more supportive of the war in Iraq while the opposite holds for Muslims
 - Evangelicals more likely to support the war in Iraq and President Bush's policies than the other eight largest religions in the U.S.
 - Countries with a higher percent of Muslims (excluding the Middle East) have had a lower opinion of the war in Afghanistan

Centrist Foreign Policy Opinions

- Public opinion on security issues is centrist
- The public refused to take extreme views during the nuclear weapons crisis
 - 60% of respondents to a 1940 survey believed atom bomb “a good thing”, a third of respondents believed it to be “bad”, small portion of population had strong views
- Views easily influenced by President in power
 - 50% of the population reported they would change their views on bombing in Vietnam if President Carter did

Hypotheses:

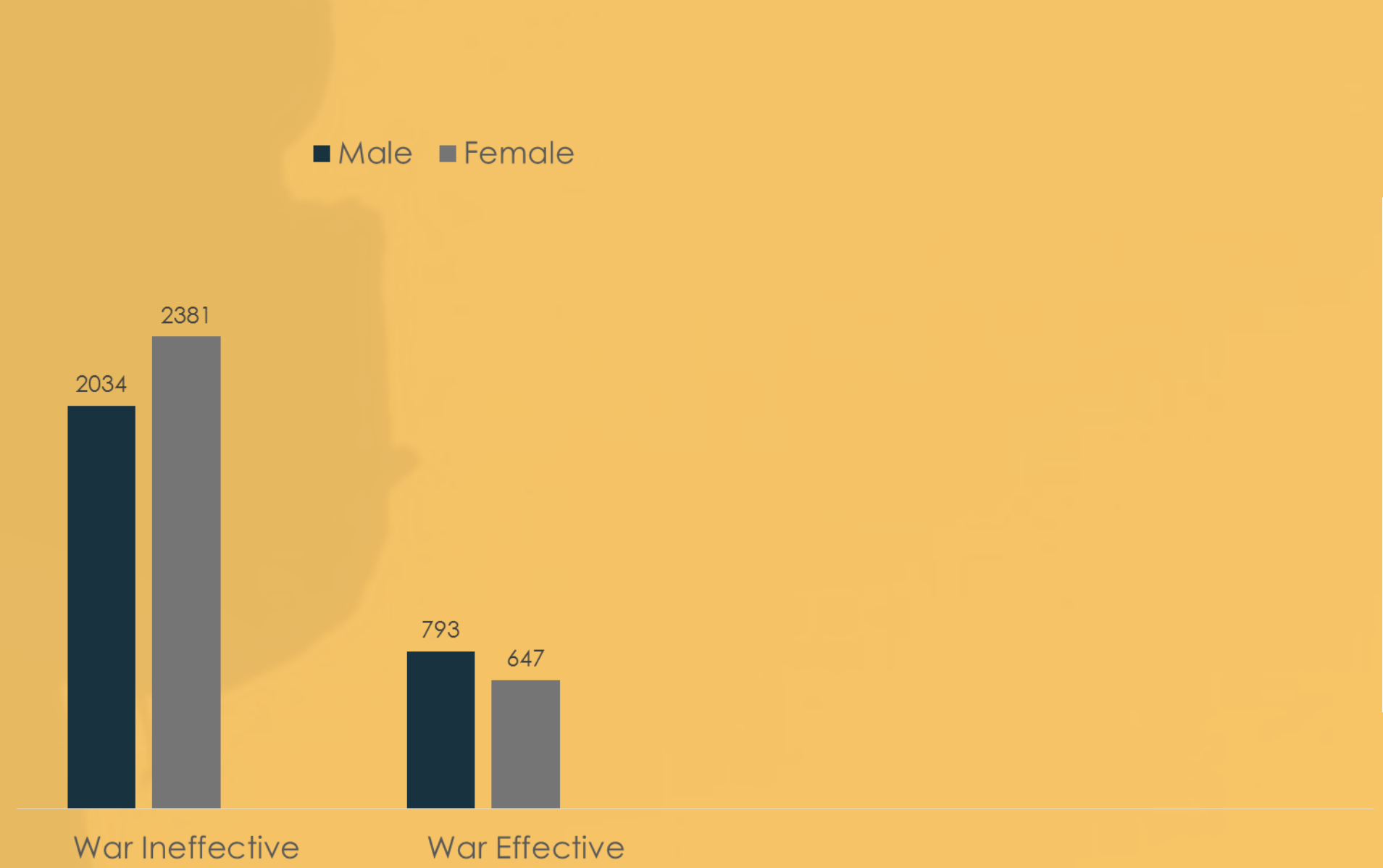
H 1: Men are more likely than women to believe the war in Afghanistan has been effective in decreasing the threat of terrorism.

H 2: Individuals with conservative (liberal) worldviews are more (less) likely believe the war in Afghanistan has been effective.

H 3: Individuals who have a higher level of trust in government are more likely to believe the war in Afghanistan has been effective.

Data

H 1: Gender



Graph Interpretation

- 71.9% of males compared to 78.6% of females believe the war in Afghanistan has been ineffective in reducing the threat of terrorism.
- 28.1% of males compared to 21.4% of females believe the war in Afghanistan has been effective in reducing the threat of terrorism.

H 2: Worldview

Table 1: worldview in terms of **religion**

	Bible Should be Taken Literally	Bible Should not be Taken Literally
War Ineffective (percent)	74.4%	75.7%
War Effective (percent)	25.6%	24.3%

Table 2: worldview in terms of **ideology**

	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
War Ineffective (percent)	75.5%	75.7%	77.7%
War Effective (percent)	24.5%	24.3%	22.3%

H 3: Trust in Government

Table 3: Relationship between perceived efficacy of war in Afghanistan and perceived level of corruption in the government.

	How Many in Govn't Are Corrupt and Effectiveness of War in Afghanistan for Terrorism
Pearson Correlation	.101
Significance (2-tailed)	.000

Table 4: How often trust government in Washington?

	Always	Most of the Time	About Half the Time	Some of the Time	Never
War Ineffective (percent)	50.0%	69.6%	75.4%	74.8%	86.8%
War Effective (percent)	50.0%	30.4%	24.6%	25.2%	13.2%

Findings

H 1: “Gender”

The bar chart shows a 6% difference in responses to the efficacy of the war between genders. Males are 6% more likely to believe the war is an effective means of fighting terrorism than females.

H 2: Worldview

The table shows a 1.3% difference in responses to the efficacy of the war between those who take the Bible literally and those who do not. Those who do take the Bible literally are 1.3% more likely to believe the war is an effective means of fighting terrorism than those who do not take the Bible literally.

H 3: Trust in Government

While the relationship between perceived corruption and perceived efficacy of the war is weak according to the correlation coefficient (.101), it is highly significant ($p = .000$) which makes it worth noting. The second question under this independent variable also shows a relationship: as level of trust in government falls so does the perceived efficacy of the war in Afghanistan.

Conclusions

- Attitudes toward whether or not the war in Afghanistan has been effective in reducing the threat of terrorism are mainly consistent across variables.
- Gender and worldview have tendencies to predict an individual's perception of the war, but are not reliable due to high p-values and low correlation coefficients.
- Trust in government is the variable with the most influence over an individual's perception of the war in Afghanistan.
- More research could be done to explore how an individual's understanding of terrorism and the threat it poses to self and/or country influences their opinion on the efficacy of a war-based approach

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