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Partisanship and Fear of Terrorism

Understanding How Ideologies and Political Parties Affect Fear

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Introduction

A Review of the Literature

Voters' attitudes:

This study will analyze who is more afraid of terrorism on a scale from very conservative to very liberal. It will examine the effects that fear has on voters, especially attitude and opinion changes that occur.

- Studies show that fear of terrorism makes people more conservative in ideology (Nail & McGregor, 2009)
- Research suggests that when voters are fearful of a terrorist attack they are most likely to trust a male republican and least likely to trust a female democrat (Holman, Merolla & Zechmeister, 2016)
- There has been investigation into how voters react during times of crisis, showing that people are most likely to trust the party that typically "owns" the topic in discussion (Albertson & Gadarian, 2016).
 - Voters have expressed that Republicans typically "own" the issue of national security
 - Republicans are seen as the more tough and pro-military party

Along with research into voters' attitude changes, there is also significant research to how a fear of terrorism positively affects trust in government.

Effects of fear:

Not only is it important to understand how a fear of terrorism changes attitudes of voters, but also the effects of those attitude changes.

- If a person experiences attitude changes due to fear of terrorism, they will act on these changes, such as voting, lobbying, and protesting in order to keep themselves safe.

The knowledge of these attitude changes allows politicians, political parties, and news stations to shift their policies, commentary, or speeches in order to please a feared electorate.

- In the primaries of the 2016 election, a fear of terrorism was linked to voting for Trump (MacWilliams, 2016).
- People are more willing to limit individual freedoms of groups they assume to be connected with terrorism, possibly pointing to why Trumps 2016 "immigration ban" had much support from his electorate (Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav 2005)

Hypotheses and Methods

H1: The more conservative a person is, the more afraid they will be of a large scale terrorist attack on the United States

H2: The more conservative a person is, the more likely they are to disagree with the statement, "The United States is doing a good job responding to terrorism"

H3: The more educated a person is, the less they will be afraid of a large scale terrorist attack on the United States

The first and second hypothesis are to test what the previous research has theorized. This tests not only the fear of terrorism with relation to political ideology but also a persons trust in government to handle terrorism and that relation with their political ideology. The third hypothesis is to test another independent variable that could be affecting a persons fear of an attack besides political ideology.

By using the 2016 Chapman University Survey on American Fears, this study examines respondents fear of a large scale terrorist attack and their opinions on how the United States is responding to terrorism by using independent variables of political ideology and levels of education. These variables are directly drawn from the survey questions asked to respondents in the 2016 Chapman University Survey on American Fears

The dependent variable regarding fear of terrorism, in both questions, is recoded on a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" on a four point scale. "Strongly agree" is coded as 1, "agree" as 2, "disagree" as 3, and "strongly disagree" as 4. Those who refused to answer the question were coded as -1, but this data was excluded in order to get accurate measurements of the means.

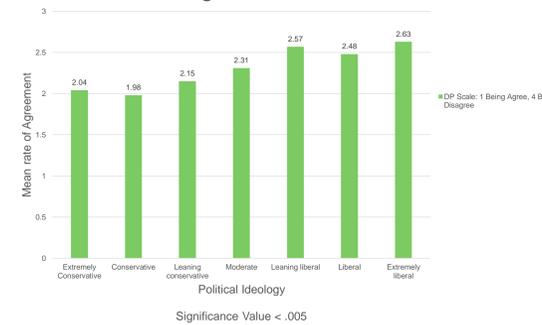
Acknowledgments

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Results

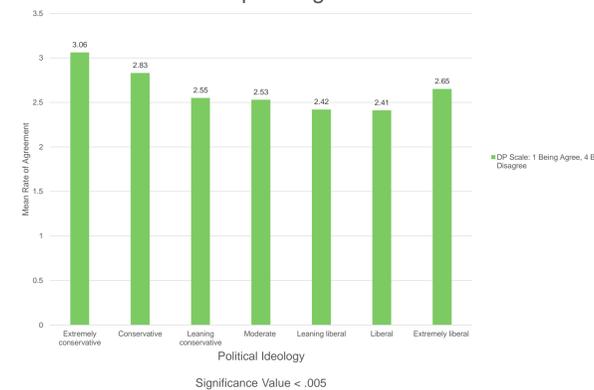
Hypothesis 1

The United States is likely to experience a large scale terrorist event



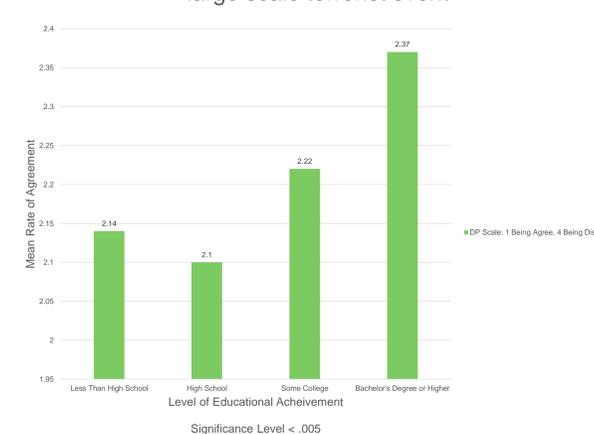
Hypothesis 2

The Government has Done a Good Job Responding to Terrorism



Hypothesis 3

The United States is likely to experience a large scale terrorist event



Conclusions

Hypothesis 1

- Hypothesis 1 proves to be correct that someone who is conservative is more likely to be afraid of terrorism than someone who is liberal, with moderates in the middle of the two. There are some irregularities in the hypothesis between some of the sub-categories, such as between "leaning liberal" and "liberal", but between conservatives and liberals generally, conservatives are more afraid of a large scale terrorist attack.

Hypothesis 2

- Hypothesis 2 proves to be correct in that the more conservative a person is, the more likely they are to disagree that the United States is doing a good job responding to terrorism, except for those who identify as "extremely liberal". This group responded very differently than hypothesized, being the grouped with the third highest disapproval rate. There could be multiple explanations to this, and there must be further research to identify why people who are extremely liberal differ so much from what is expected.

Hypothesis 3

- Hypothesis 3 proves to be correct after a person has graduated high school, but not before. The means test shows that someone with their GED is more likely to think a terrorist attack is going to happen than someone who has not. Because the level of education is grouped together, it is not as accurate as viewing the means test for each level of education, but it is still significant.

Overall, it is shown that political ideology has a large influence over a persons attitudes regarding terrorism, along with a persons education. Further research into affects of these results on the political climate and various outliers of this data will be necessary.

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