War Narrative and Public Opinion

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Introduction

- Public attitude towards war has been empirically studied only through the lenses of potential military interventions. Findings suggest that several factors such as elites cues (Berinsky 2009; Gelpi et al. 2009), personal characteristics(Dupuis & Cohn, 2011; Lee and Chu 2019), and the perceived legitimacy (Lee, 2022; Tomz & Weeks, 2020) influence public opinion

- However, little has been done to estimate what factors might shape public potential support for one side over another in the outside conflict. In the past few years, given the Russian-Ukrainian and Israel-Palestine wars, the question "What country do you most sympathize with?" has become particularly important.

- According to theoretical literature, just war theory determines the just cause, rightful authority, and proportional means for waging war, as well as guidelines for the humane treatment of combatants and non-combatants (Lazar, 2017).

- The framing techniques used by the media sources highlight particular individual values within an issue, making the message more persuasive (Olmastroni, 2014)

- We predict that the framing of the war, the US endorsement of one of the sides, and war conduct will significantly influence public opinion

Methods

Sample

The survey was conducted online by Qualtrics from their online database meant to be representative of American adults (n=50, pilot study) The treatments were randomly assigned for each vignette independently. The order of the answer choices for the outcome questions was randomized as well.

Measures

We posed 3 hypothetical scenarios of inter-state wars, each involved one randomly assigned treatment: the framing given by one of the sides of the conflict or no framing. The framing emphasized the specific reason for the war declared by one of the sides and includes the leader's quote defending that narrative. Real president speeches were used as templates. The main dependent variable asked what side the respondent mostly sympathizes with

The main outcome variable: Sympathy (ordinal variable, 1- Entirely with X to 5- Entirely with Y). The treatment variable was what kind of framing was applied if any, the US endorsement, and war crimes committed by any of the sides.

Research Questions

- Is there an association between the war framing and what side an individual takes in a conflict?
- Does the US endorsement of one of the sides predict which one will be chosen by a respondent?
- Does the violation of war conduct significantly shift public attitude regarding the war and the side they support?

Preliminary Results

Bivariate Graphs

- The general trend is remarkable. The size f the effect though remains uncertain due to the size of the pilot sample

- As expected, pro-Green framing was associated with stronger support for the Green side, while pro-Gold framing predicted a slight increase in support for Gold. This pattern is not strong in the Vignette 2 though.

- The Vignette 3 demonstrates the effect of the US endorsement. In the condition, where the US raised doubts regarding the legitimacy of the Orange actions, respondents showed a greater support for Blue as opposed to when the US endorsed Orange.

- The unjust war conduct in Vignette 4 is correlated with the public support of the opposing side. In the condition where Blue committed war crimes, the public demonstrated a profound support for Orange and vice versa.

Ordinal Regression

- The pro-Gold framing is associated with an increase in the log odds of support for Gold by 1.0509 compared to pro-Green framing

- The pro-Yellow framing is correlated with an increase in the log odds of support for Yellow by 1.2304 compared to pro-Red framing.

- The US doubts regarding the legitimacy of Orange actions predicts an increase in the log odds of support for Blue by 1.7836 compared to the US endorsement

- The war crimes committed by Blue decrease the log odds of support for Blue by 6.6541 compared to the crimes committed by Orange

Figure 1. The Association between Sympathy for Green/Gold and the Framing Condition
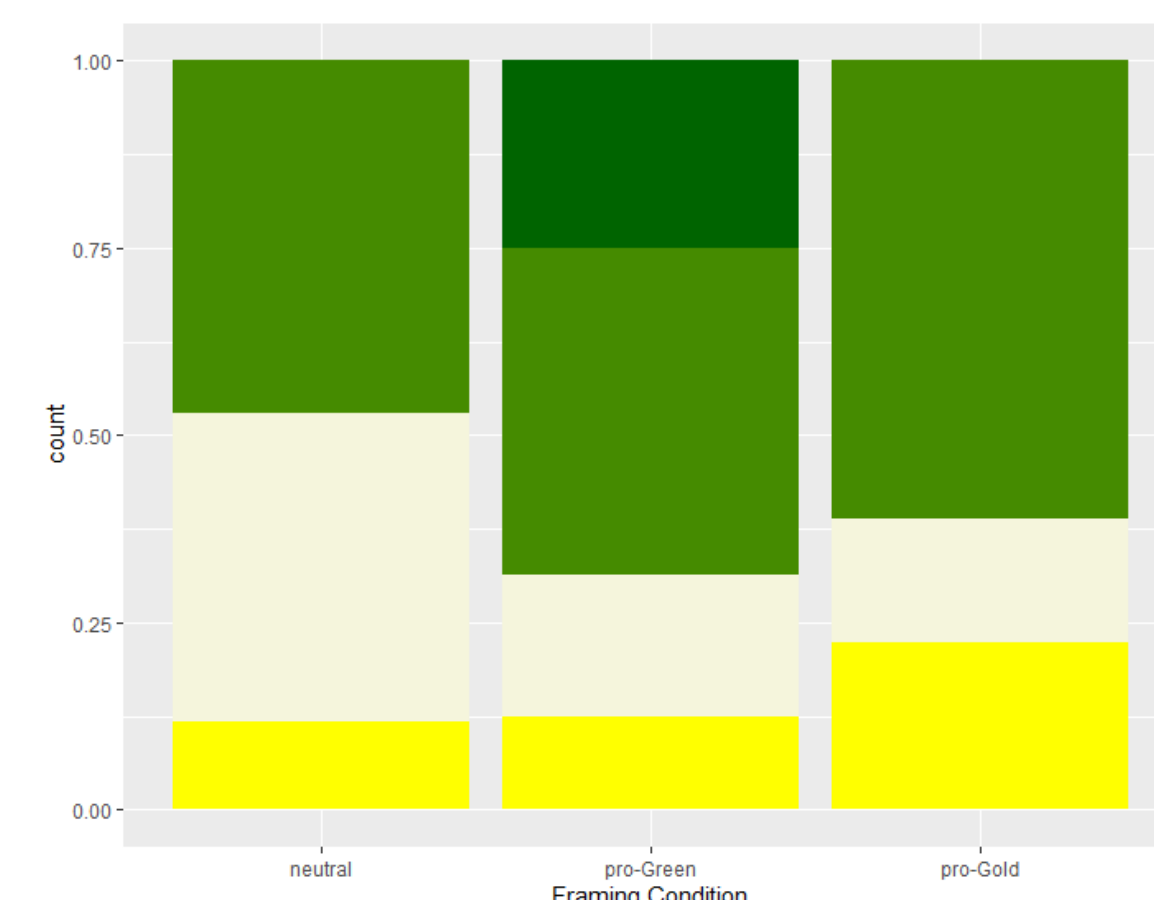
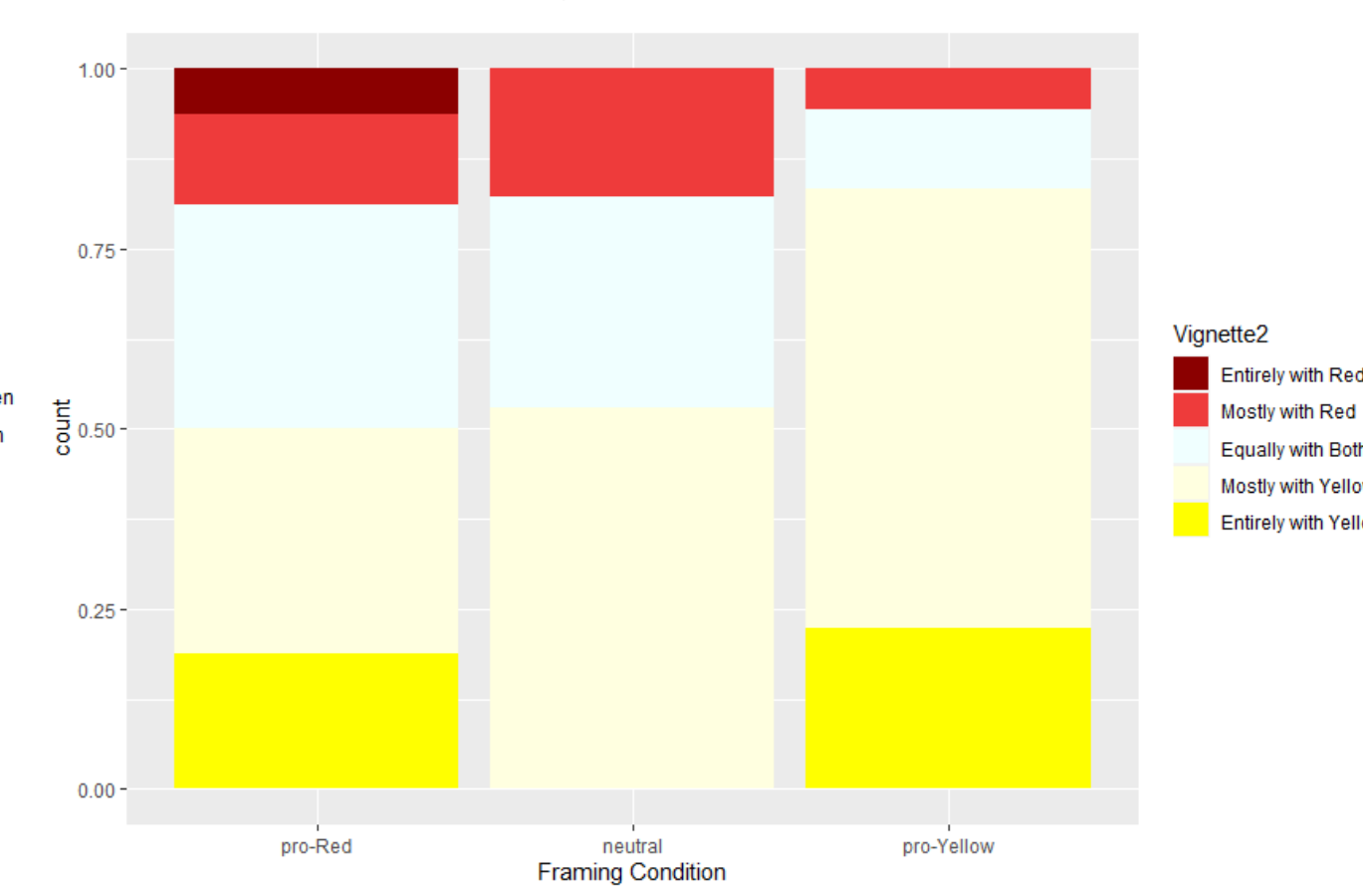Figure 2. The Association between Sympathy for Red/Yellow and the Framing Condition

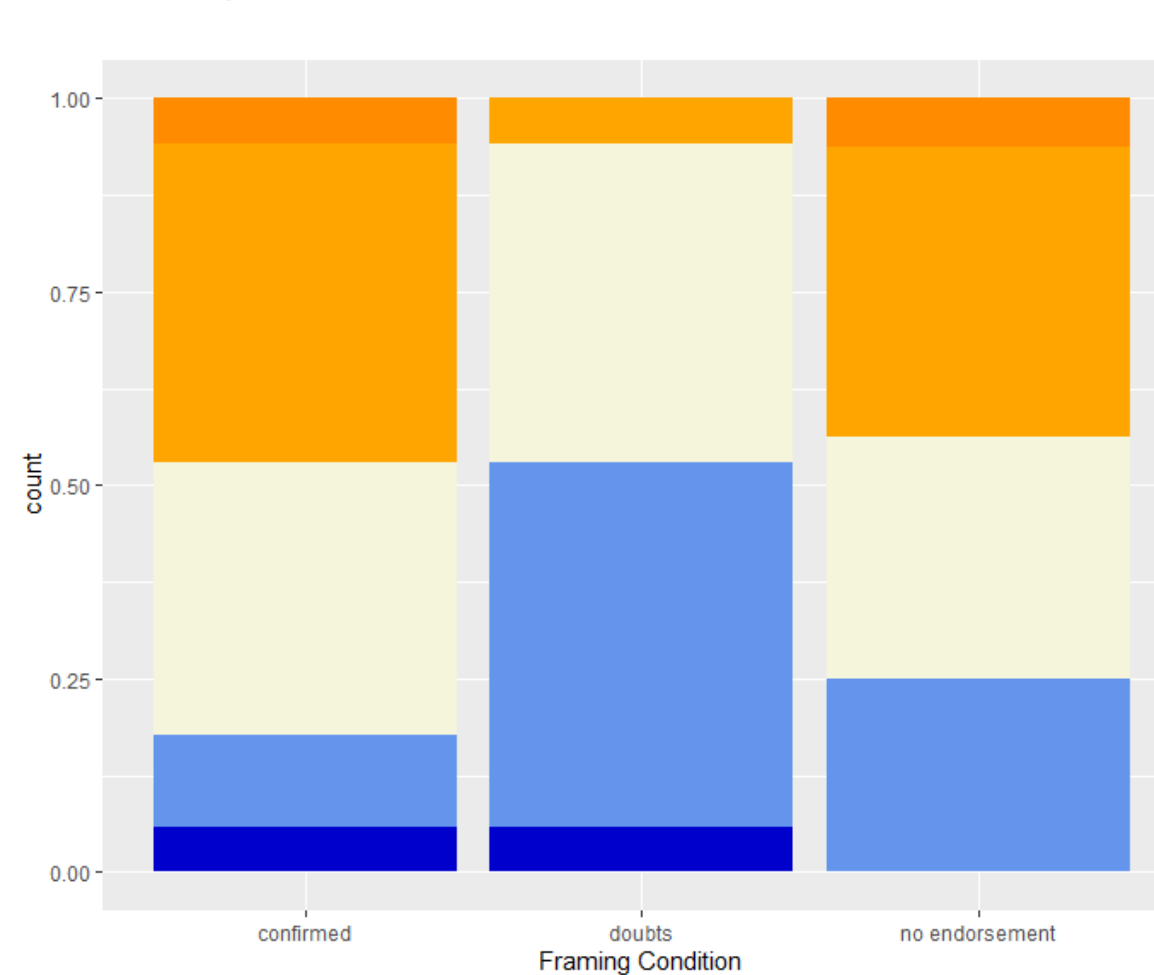Figure 3. The Association between Sympathy for Orange/Blue and the US Endorsement

Figure 4. The Association between Sympathy for Orange/Blue and War Conduct
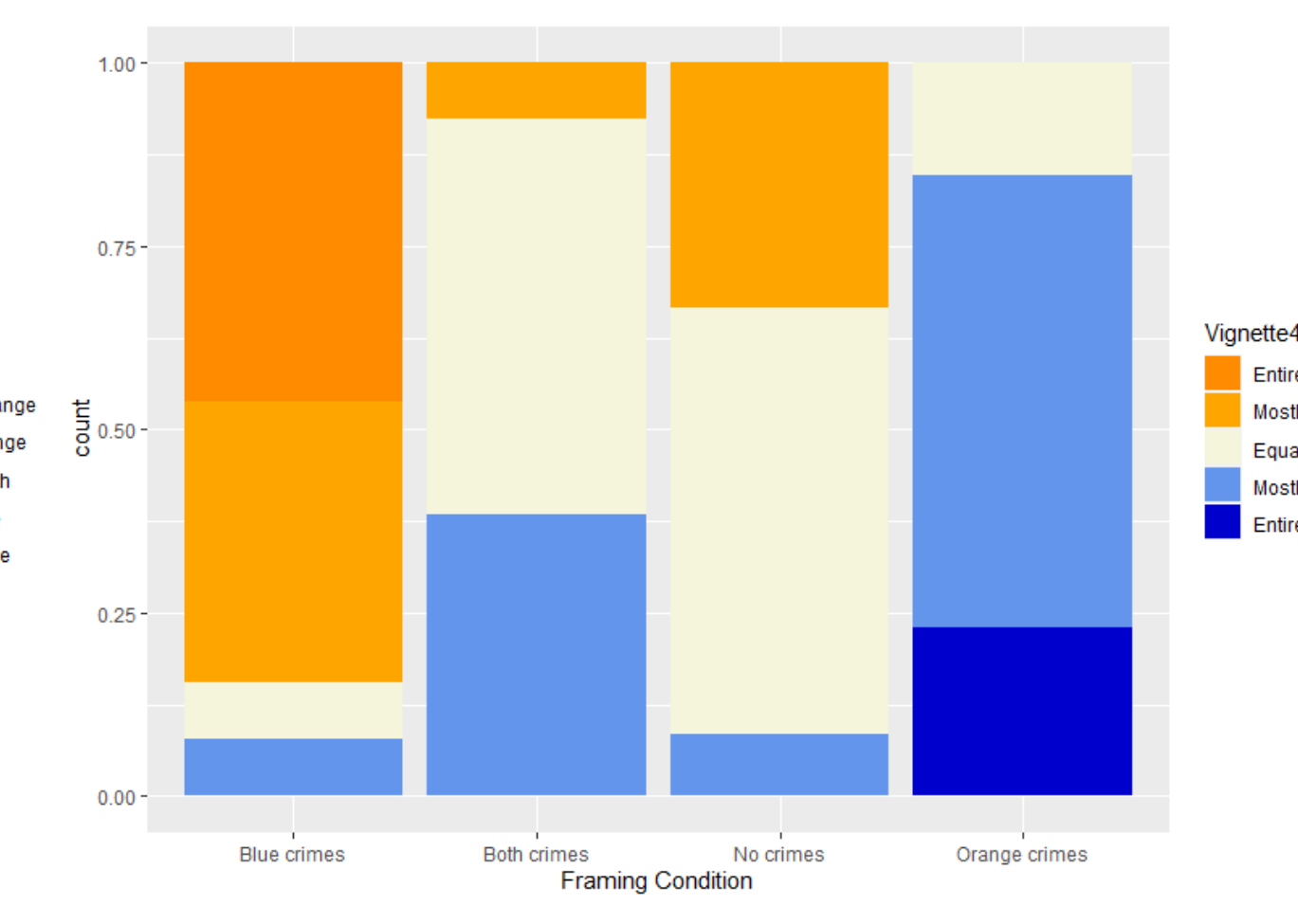
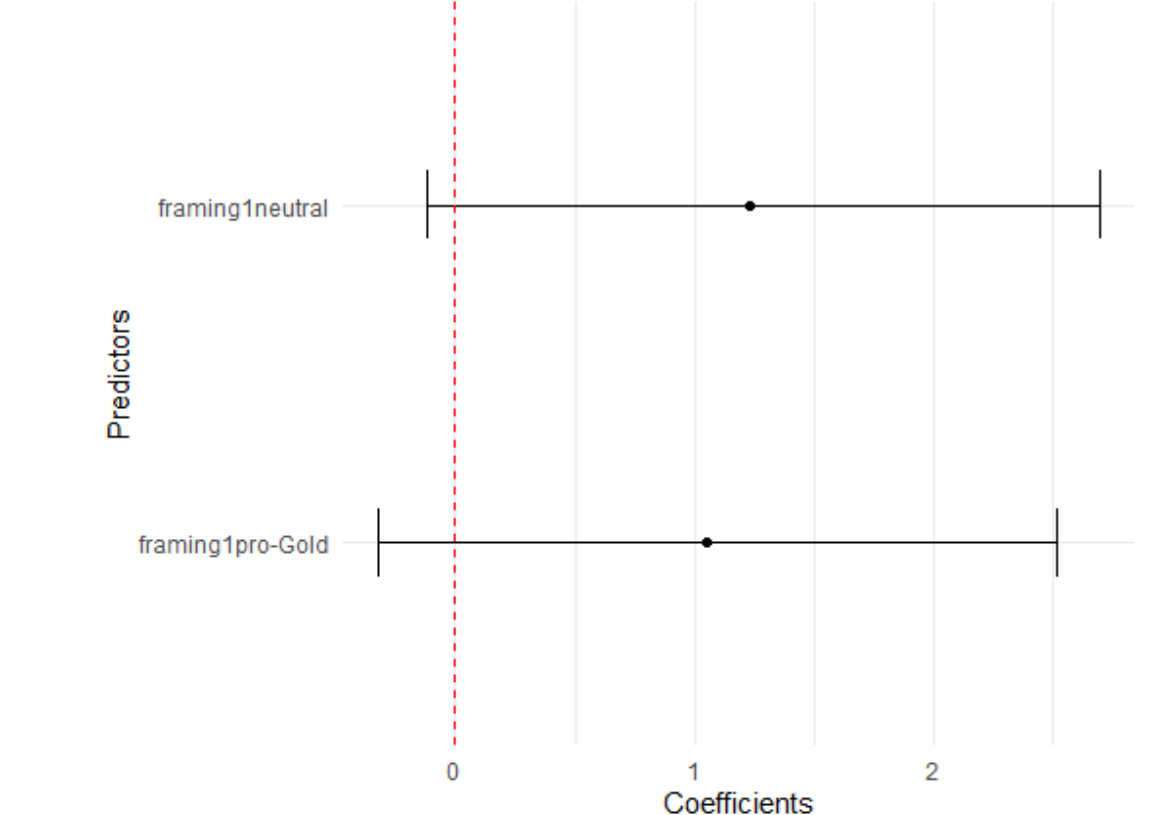Figure 5. The Coefficient Plot of the Effect Size of the Framing in Vignette 1

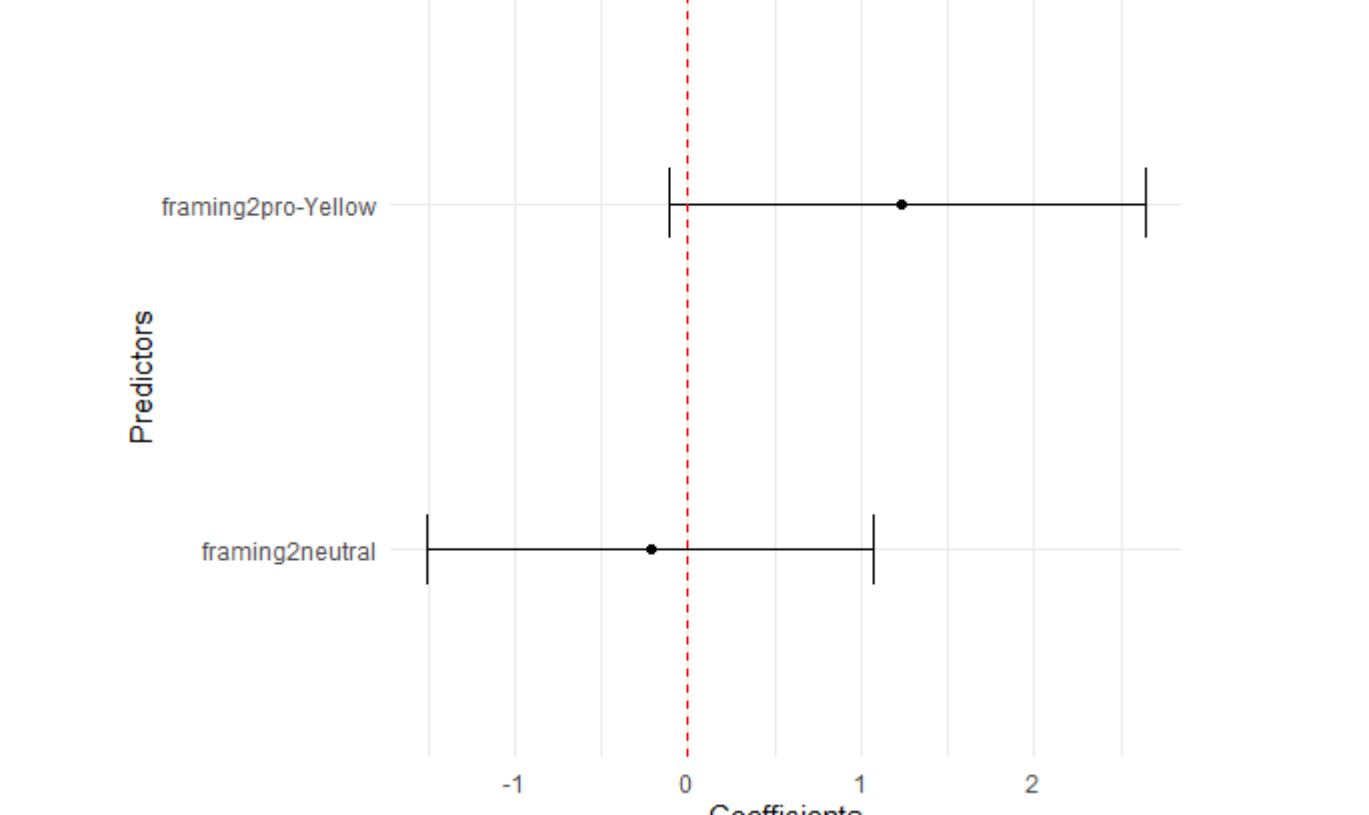Figure 6. The Coefficient Plot of the Effect Size of the Framing in Vignette 2

Figure 7. The Coefficient Plot of the Effect Size of the US Endorsement in Vignette 3
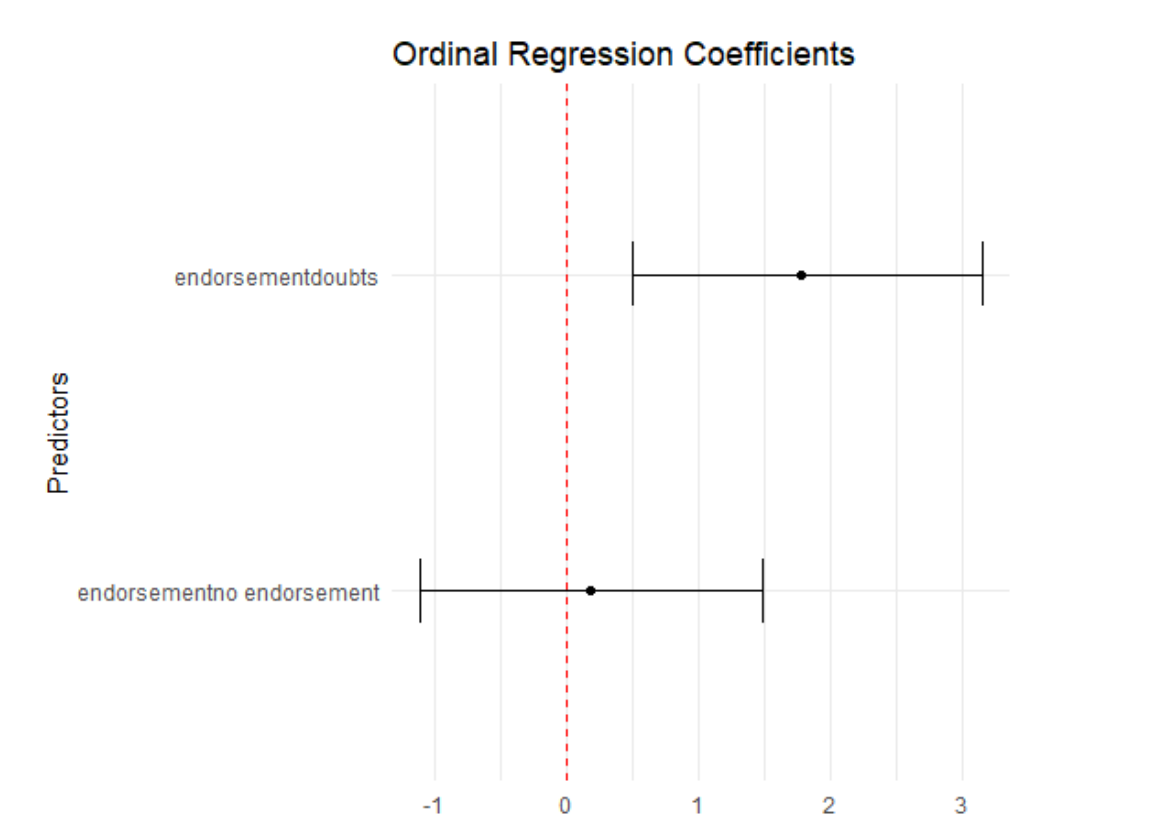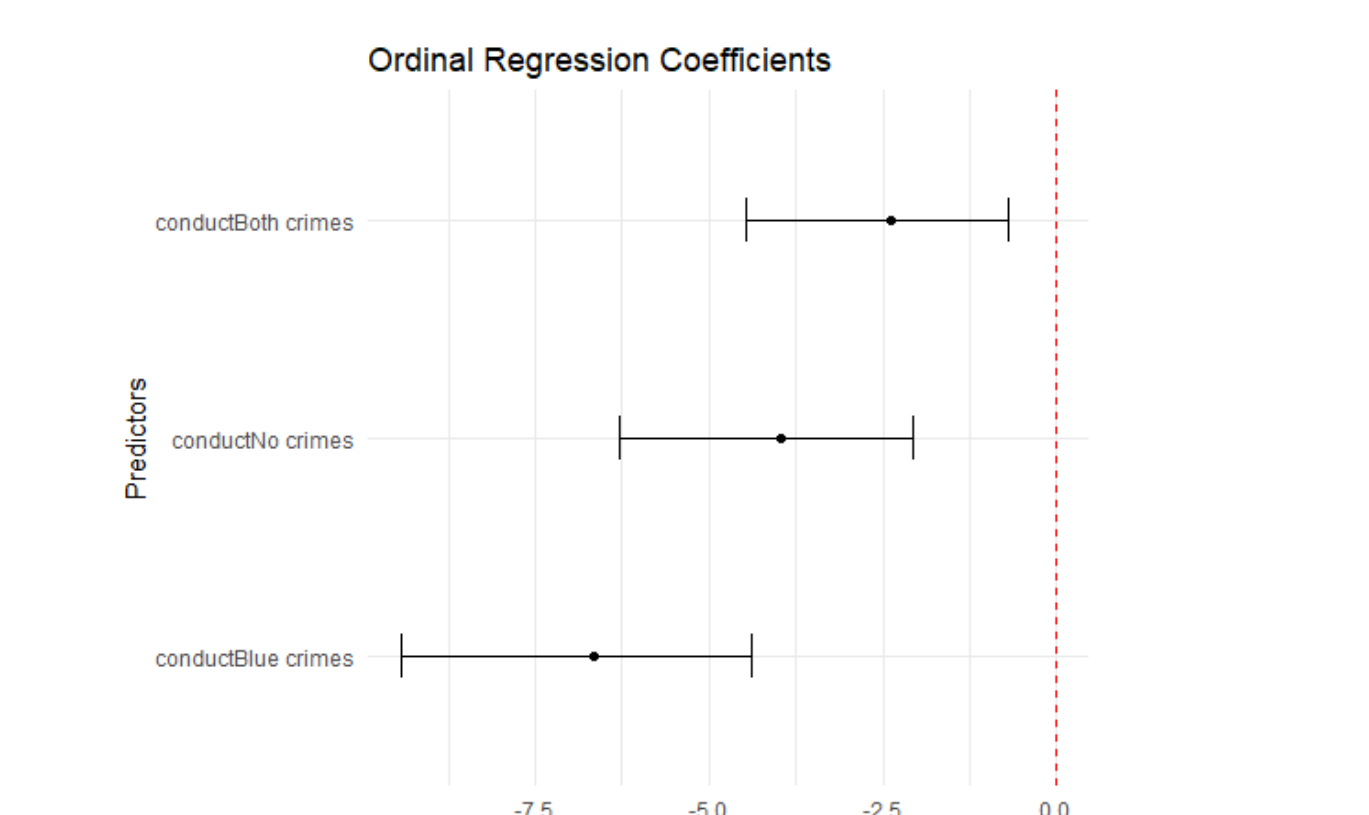
Figure 8. The Coefficient Plot of the Effect Size of War Conduct in Vignette 4

Discussion

- The preliminary results have demonstrated the expected general trend. However, the effect of framing was anticipated to be stronger. One potential explanation for that could be the phrasing of the Sympathy question, which might have led respondents to associate the country with citizens only. Less emotionally phrased question should be added.

- One of the main outcome variables that we planned to include was the respondents' support for the sending military aid to one of the sides. However, there was a tendency to avoid sending any aid. In the final study, we might rephrase the question.

- It might also be worth mentioning the US ties with one of the sides and include it as a treatment variable, as the US position on the conflict seems to matter a lot to an individual.

- The final study will add a new perspective on how an individual makes a decision to take a side in the outside conflict and close an existing gap in the literature.

References

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