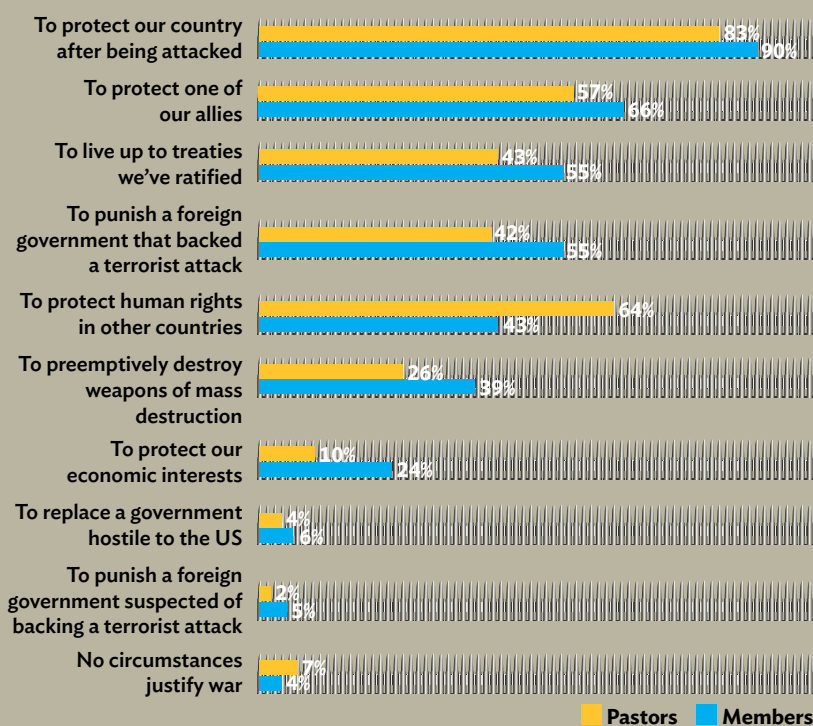


What justifies war?



Opinions on when war is justified



Changing opinions on what justifies war: 2002 vs. 2012



Sources: May 2002 and November 2012 Presbyterian Panel surveys

Very few Presbyterians are pacifists, as these results show. But Presbyterians vary widely in their views on the specific circumstances that justify war.

These variations follow a rough continuum. At one end are purely defensive actions that majorities of both members and pastors believe justify war. These include protecting our own country and coming to the aid of an ally under attack. At the other end are actions that the United States might initiate, in circumstances that seem less vital to our country's survival (to protect our economic interests, to replace another country's hostile government, to punish governments only suspected of terrorism).

In between are situations that have been presented as justifications, whether accurately or not, for three recent US military interventions: in Afghanistan (punishing backers of terrorism), Iraq (destroying weapons of mass destruction), and Libya (protecting human rights).

It's perhaps not surprising then that, when it comes to several such situations, fewer Presbyterians feel war is justified now than they did in 2002. The only exception is war to protect human rights: in that circumstance, the percentage of people who believe war is justified has increased.

Opinions on war to protect human rights reveal another distinctive outcome: it is the only circumstance that more pastors than members view as justifiable. Generally, pastors are more reluctant than members to see war as a solution, but threats to individual life and liberty are noteworthy exceptions.

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