

WILL GOD'S GRACE GUIDE MY VOTE?

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GUIDING QUESTIONS

Elections often happen in public places, including many Houses of Worship. This project aims to understand the relationship between primes of religion and its influence on political attitudes.

- 1. Do subliminal religious primes influence political decision-making?
- 2. If yes, in which direction on the left-right scale?

HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses for the study were made from information in past research regarding the voting patterns of religious individuals. Since a growing number of religious people lean Republican, the hypotheses reflect this trend.

- 1. Religious primes influence political decisions
- 2. People think more conservatively in the religious mindset

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

- Voting in churches can serve as reminders to people's faiths and subliminally prime their political stances [1].
- Americans are religious individuals, with 85% of people identifying with a major denomination of worship [2].
- As such, religion becomes a part of identity that can influence political decisions. Since religions teach people about living moral lives, this world view can be applied to understanding how politics ought to be.
- Often, politicians incorporate overt or subtle religious messages in their campaigns to attract people of faith to their cause.
- Likewise, preachers often instruct their followers to "go with the Word" before elections [2], which can influence the votes of the parishioners.
- High costs of voting leads voters to be susceptible to primes and heuristics [1].

Materials & Methods

Participants and Recruitment:

- 304 of 356 original respondents incorporated in analysis (133 identify as female)
- Recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk
- Participants were paid \$1 for their participation

Experiment Tasks:

- Sentence Reorganization Participants saw 5 word chunks (of religious or neutral content) and had to rearrange them to make logical sentences.
- Statement and Agreement on Controversial Issue Participants read vignettes supporting or countering abortion and were asked to rate the quality of the argument along with the extent they agreed
- Religiosity Measure Survey on religious identity
- Demographic Questions Questions include race, gender, and political affiliation
- Manipulation Check

RESULTS 1

Description of Participants

- The majority (n = 172) identified as non-religious
- Most identified with the Democrat party (n = 137)
- 217 participants identified as 40 or younger

Table 1: Results for 2×2 ANOVA

Variables	df	SS	MS	F	p-value
Prime	1	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.984
Argument	1	280.00	280.03	56.22	0.001***
Interaction	1	0.8	0.79	0.159	0.690
Residuals	299	1489.00	4.98		

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

- No Interaction for Religious Prime and Argument (F(1,299) = 0.159, p = .69, $\eta^2 = .00$)
- No main effect of Religious Prime (F(1,299)) = 0.00, p = .98, $\eta^2 = .00$)
- Main effect of Argument (F(1,299) = 56.22, p = .001, $\eta^2 = .16$)

Method of Analysis

- 2 (Prime Condition: Religious or Neutral) ×
 2 (Issue Condition: Liberal or Conservative)
 ANOVA Between-Subjects design
- \bullet $\alpha = .05$

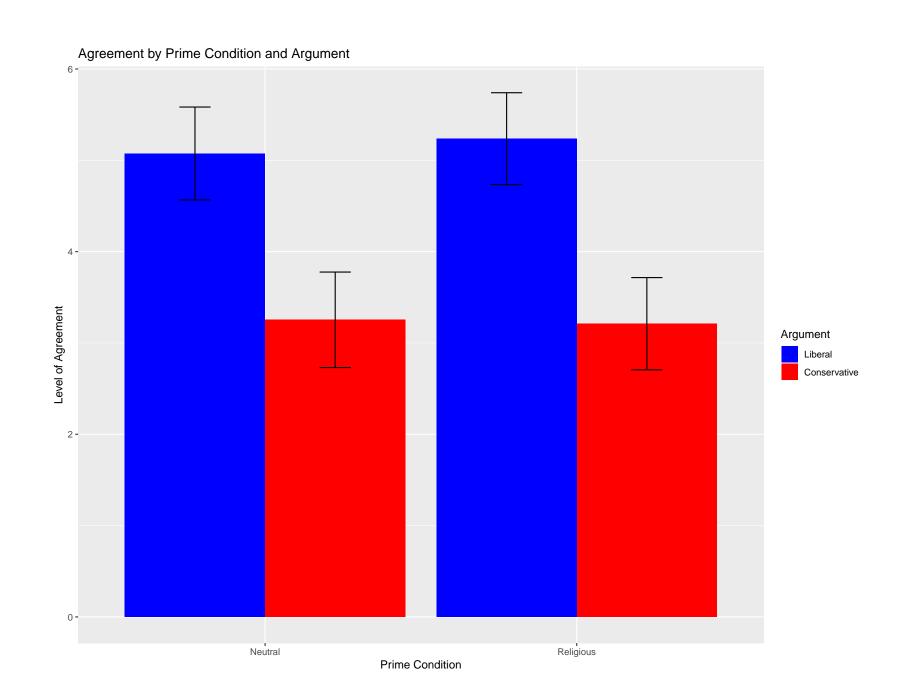


Figure 1: Average Agreement to Argument by Prime Condition

CONCLUSION

Findings from the Study

- Religious primes did not influence vote choice No matter what priming condition participants were in, they were equally likely to voice support or reject the argument
- Main effect present on Argument variable -Participants seemed to carry preconceptions on the topic based on ideology
- Agreement on the issue did not depend on the prime or argument condition

Limitations of the Study

- Amazon Mechanical Turk: The participants were relatively more liberal and secular, leading to a natural tendency to favor the liberal side of the argument.
- The Topic: People have relatively robust stances on abortion. Future iterations can analyze how people react to topics that are less debated, with religious primes added to the experiment.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Jonah Berger, Marc Meredith, and S. Christian Wheeler. Contextual Priming: Where People Vote Affects How They Vote. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 105(26):8846–8849, 2008.
- [2] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell. *American grace: how religion divides and unites us.* Simon & Schuster, New York, 2010.

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Analyze voter files and precinct returns to link people who voted in precincts with the percentage of people who vote on down ballot candidates.
- In future experiments, use of a less polar-

izing subject as manipulation so that people would not enter the study with preconceived notions about the topic, which were largely reflected in their qualitative responses

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